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Student Stories Dealing with Issues of Justice in Mainstream and Sudbury School Contexts

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Abstract

The research examines issues of justice in both a mainstream and Sudbury school contexts through a narrative research of students' perception of justice and injustice in situations at their primary and high schools in the Netherlands. By examining this neglected voice in the public debate of justice procedures in school, I clarify how their conception of justice and injustice informed significant turning points in their lives. The life history of four participants with diverse backgrounds studied in this master's thesis includes a nonviolent understanding of situations at school that were resolved from a retributive or restorative justice framework. I used two major qualitative method analyses: (1) thematic content analysis and (2) critical incident analysis. Data have been collected from eight semi-structured interviews with four students who experienced both mainstream and Sudbury school contexts. This master's thesis challenges the assumption that adults should be fully authorized to make fair judgements in school and students are incapable of making sound judgements. The research shows that the students' conception of justice and injustice entail five interrelated features, including (1) student's interest, (2) their ability to participate in situations involving justice, (3) their acceptance of authority, (4) their perception of procedural justice and (5) their perception of just outcomes. These students experienced that some of the limitations imposed by some adults appeared to be unjust. These recurring instances contributed to a situation in which they dropped out of the mainstream school. School contexts in which students perceived to be treated justly appear to affect multiple areas of their lives positively. This implies that justice issues are subjective in nature, socially created, and depend on collective agreement of the implemented rules and procedures that regulate justice in school. By considering issues of justice in mainstream schools from a student's perspective who has also experienced an alternative school context, a refreshing exploration of justice issues in a mainstream school context was possible. This includes the reconsideration of the ways justice practices affect students' lives, the complexities involved in students' perspectives on justice and injustice, and the way we design justice procedures in school.

Keywords: democratic school, Sudbury school, primary education in the Netherlands, secondary education in the Netherlands, restorative practice, retributive justice, nonviolent communication, narrative research.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

EUDEC	European Democratic Education Community
HAVO	Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs (Secondary Higher Education)
JC	Judicial Commitee
Loc.	Location
MBO	Vocational Education
NVC	Nonviolent Communication
PABO	Pedagogic Academy for Primary Education
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
RJ	Restorative Justice
RP	Restorative Practice
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
VWO	Voortgezet Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (Secondary Academic Education)

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1 | Introduction

Good values have to be grown from the inside out. Praise and privileges and punishments can change behavior (for a while), but they cannot change the person who engages in the behavior - at least, not in the way we want. No behavioral manipulation ever helped a child develop a commitment to becoming a caring and responsible person.

- Kohn, 1999, p. 161

The physical and social environment in which students go to school look radically different than two generations ago. Technological advances, globalization and climate change have contributed to an increasingly complex and dynamic world in which students grow up. The recognition that countries and people are more interconnected, affect the themes discussed in public debate, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) promoted by the UN. Trends such as the increasing mobility of people, goods and ideas; emancipation of marginalized groups in society; and societal implications of increased life expectancy, affect educational institutions (OECD, 2019). The public in western countries have generally authorized schools to prepare their children for democratic citizenship, economic functioning, and individual well-being (Alderson, 1999). However, certain issues in education seem to erode the school's justification of credibility and authority.

Firstly, the school's promise to prepare students for democratic citizenship seems to be at odds with the organizational structure of the school. While EU member countries, including The Netherlands, pledge to the values of "respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and rule of law" (EU, 2020), their national education systems are mostly structured hierarchically. Key characteristics of these mainstream schools include a mandatory curriculum, standardized testing, teachers as central authority figure, school schedules, and school bells.[1] These features originate from the Prussian national school model (Becker and Woessmann, 2010; Van Horn Melton, 2003). Around 1763 the Prussians developed a state organized and controlled education system, which trained teachers to teach skills including "reading, writing and math," and molding the character of students into the acceptance of "ethics, law, discipline and obedience" (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009, p. 69). This implies that historically, the school was designed to "condition children to be passive and to obey authority," as opposed to deliver democratically minded, proactive citizens (Moravec, 2013, p. 137). Initiatives such as the education

for democracy campaign launched by the Council of Europe in 2018 underscore the considered importance of addressing the lack of democracy in schools (Council of Europe, 2020).

Secondly, school certificates seem to become less of a job guarantee, as the gap between knowledge and skills taught and those asked in the labor market has widened. According to Burnham (2006) the aims of the mainstream school model resembles the demands of the industrial economy. Schools can be understood as institutions that batch and deliver industrial workers, and managers to factories (Robinson, 2010). Students enter school per age year, sorted according to academic potential, and packaged with CV's to the labor force (Robinson, 2010). While this may have worked in the twentieth century as a guarantee for blue or white collar jobs, many of those jobs that could be automatized and mechanized now disappeared (Moravec, 2013). Instead, a twenty-first century workplace emphasizes the value of transferable skills, which can be implemented in different places, with different people and in different jobs. This implies that human skills that cannot be replaced by machines (yet) become increasingly important, including creativity, authenticity, purposefulness, and empathy (OECD, 2018). However, such essential skills as creativity and imagination are most likely killed in mainstream schools (Robinson, 2007; Land, 2011). Worse, influential drivers in school reform, such as international tests like PISA and TIMSS seem to push for more standardization and privatization in education. In doing so, key features in mainstream schools appear to be encouraged rather than changed (West-Burnham, 2006). Einstein already remarked that "it is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry" (Hawkin, 2009, p. 346). As economic interest acknowledges the potential economic value of schooling, the standardization policies that ought to improve the economic value of schools seem to prepare students less rather than more for their future jobs.

Thirdly, the conflicting practices and intentions in schools harm students, as schools tend to produce "passive, bored, aimless, and even worse: self-destructive and violent" adults that enter work and civic life (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2013, p. 141; Olson, 2009; Robinson, 2007). Mainstream school practices usually conform explicitly or implicitly to a modernist or technocratic view of the world. Miller (2000) argues that such worldview defines education as a means to transmit a "politically sanctioned "curriculum," to its younger

[1]In this research, I will use the term mainstream school in the context of the Dutch education system. The term includes private schools, public schools, religious oriented schools, special schools, and schools that follow practices of traditional reformers such as Steiner schools or Montessori schools. For those who are unfamiliar with the Dutch education system, more background information is provided in appendix A.

population" (p. vi). In turn, the system uses the pedagogical tools of objective testing for academic performance and efficient classroom management (Miller, 2000). The exercise of such strict adult control has resulted in "millions of children learn[ing] to shut up and do what they're told" (Kohn, 1999, p. 165). Practices of adult-imposed requirements and punishments often instill fear and/or hatred in children. Common punishments could include incarceration in the form of "getting grounded"; detention by forced "time-out procedures"; humiliation by being yelled or criticized at in public; denial of meeting their needs such as food, attention, or things they enjoy doing (Kohn, 1999, p. 165). Although an adult may exercise such power inattentively as part of their daily life, for a child it "may become tomorrow's bitter memory" (Kohn, 1999, p. 166). Olson (2009) adds that many high achievers, average students, and under-performers suffer from long-lasting psychological wounds inflicted by certain experiences they had at school. Forms of harsh self-criticism appear to become internalized, including perfectionism, laziness, and underestimation. Illich (1970) would agree as he argued that mandatory schools teach commands instead of values. Values do not stem from merely telling the other person what you like them to do and punish them if they refuse. Rather they seem to come from open dialogue and mutual agreement (Rosenberg, 2005a). Thus, punitive measurements as a response to managing student behavior seems to be counterproductive if a school's aim is to foster values.

The contradictions that are experienced in school by pupils, students, educators, parents, and policy makers become a potential source for frustrations, disagreement, and conflict. In such situations the underlying issues of justice become more visible. While some researchers explored justice practices in situations of rule-breaking behavior (Fronius et al., 2016), others addressed justice issues in topical fashion, including the research on reproducing social-economic inequality (Delpit, 2006; Flecha and Soler, 2013; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2018; R. J. Skiba et al., 2000; Truong and Museus, 2012; West-Burnham, 2006), and inclusion of youth voice (Biddle, 2019; Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2019). Little qualitative research has been done on the conception of justice in school from a student's perspective (Feldman, 2001; Lewis et al., 2013; Schmader et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2007), and even fewer on primary and high school students (Feldman, 2001). The literature gap on the understanding of justice by primary and high school students may be related to mainstream adult assumption that children and adolescents are "impulsive" (Frankfurt, 2006) and "immature" (Darling, 1992, p. 55). The adult's conception of the child as "incompetent and incapable decision-makers" has been used as a justification to deny legitimate student power (Darling, 1992, 45). The adult tendency to overlook the perspective of adolescents seems to be confirmed in the relatively recent endorsement of the UN Rights of the Child in 1989 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Com-

missioner, 1989; Hartkamp, 2016), and the difficulties encountered to implement them in school settings (Alderson, 1999; Gillett-Swan and Sargeant, 2018; Hannam, 2001; Quennerstedt, 2011). The question is whether a deficient conception of children corresponds with social reality. For example, during the current corona crisis in which students were necessitated to stay home, Dutch high school teachers were surprised with the students' capacity and willingness to study independently without teacher supervision (De Volkskrant, 2020). Thus, issues of justice in school deal with many complexities as it involves various actors and is closely related to other important concepts such as freedom, democracy, authority, and equality.

This research will contribute to understanding justice from a student's perspective in a primary and high school context. To be able to hear clearly what students tell about their experience, education expert Alfie Kohn (1999) recommends the following exercise. I invite you to do this exercise now as well.

"Close your eyes (when you finish this paragraph), return to your childhood, and think of a time when you were accused of doing something bad. Recall the alleged misbehavior as specifically as you can, as well as what the adult in question did or said to you and how it made you feel" (Kohn, 1999, p. 161).

In doing this exercise, it may occur to you that the responses you came up with can vary per context and depending from which person's perspective you look at it. As justice could be a sensitive topic in public debate that can be quickly misinterpreted and misrepresented, it is even more important to pay attention to the relevant nuances and details. As a result of this, a narrative research approach is suitable to unpack the richness of the stories the students of this research tell. In my research I adopted the framework on nonviolent communication (NVC) that originated from and developed in conflict resolution practice. Through the lens of nonviolent communication, the stories students tell about justice issues become better understandable and provide insights about their social reality at school. The main question asked in this research is 'What stories do students tell about their experiences of justice during their time they attended a mainstream school and a Sudbury school?' Subsequently, it addresses two sub-questions. Firstly, how did students' notion of justice inform significant turning points in their lives? Secondly, what appears to be just and unjust in students' stories?

The study is conducted with four students from a Dutch schools modelled after the Sudbury Valley School, referred to as 'Sudbury school' in this thesis. As they all went to both mainstream schools and subsequently to a Sudbury school, their internal juxtaposition could provide a refreshing perspective on one's understanding of mainstream school contexts. The difference in school contexts could be understood as two different

ecosystems. Sometimes, if one's daily life consist of one of these settings, it could become normalized which makes it harder to notice the obvious, like fish may not notice water. When one would be on land, looking at the water surface, water becomes better noticeable. This is the angle I took with regard to the Sudbury schools in this research in relation to mainstream schools. This implies that I am not advocating for Sudbury schools replacing mainstream schools. This would be controversial to do as mandatory Sudbury schooling defeats the core of a Sudbury school's philosophy. Students need to be able to voluntarily choose whether they want to be there or not. Thus, while this research could contribute to the academic literature on Sudbury schools, in this study the Sudbury school context functions as a refreshing context through which we could see more clearly why it is important to pay more attention to issues of justice from a student's perspective in a mainstream school context.

1.1 Story of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is implicated throughout the research process. My past experiences influence the way I understand my research focus, the shape of the interviews, and the way I perform my data analyses. Hence, part of doing "good" and "ethical" qualitative research is to be reflective and aware about the lens from which I perform my research (Tracy, 2010). I will briefly discuss my lens, which consists of my underlying motivations, assumptions and values.

My interest in the topic of justice and school stem from my own encounters with the Dutch education system. I completed catholic primary school and public high school. During my time there, a puzzle caught my attention. It can be illustrated with a situation from kindergarten. I remember I was eating lunch with my classmates in an empty classroom. As response to another classmate coming in, the other children squawked that they did not want to sit next to him because he stank. I murmured that was not nice to say, although I remember myself noticing that he had a strong odor. Nevertheless, I thought that his smell was still not a justified reason to be hurtful to him. And then they said that I had to sit next to him, because I disagreed with them, and that was not the outcome I wanted either. At home, I explained this situation of conflict to my parents, whose child-raising practices embodied solidarity and cooperation. They suggested that it was best to ignore it. That was not a very satisfying response either, as it lacked the proactive, assertive, and constructive elements which I was looking for. I found it important that a response took care of me, victims, offenders and bystanders. Essentially, I was searching for a constructive strategy to cope with disagreement in a school context. During my search for answers, I encountered an excerpt from A. S. Neill's book *Summerhill: A radical Approach to Child* (1960) during my study abroad in 2016. The idea of demo-

cratic schools and the way they dealt with conflict caught my attention and I decided to dedicate my bachelors thesis on the study of the historical origins of Dutch democratic schools (Harmsen, 2016). Flash forward, in summer 2019, I could experience daily life in a student-led, democratic school during my internship in Japan. In this way, I developed familiarity with the Dutch mainstream school system and different types of democratic schools.

This familiarity with the research contexts was helpful in establishing warm relationships with the participants of this study, which is more beneficial than limiting in narrative research. As I experienced the Dutch school system and studied democratic schooling, we had a shared understanding of daily life at school in both school contexts. This allowed for a relaxed atmosphere and an interview in conversation style which resulted in nuanced and detail rich interview transcripts, which are essential for studying meaning and social reality in depth.

Being aware of the challenges involved in both mainstream and democratic schools, I am more interested in deeply understanding students' perspectives on justice rather than confirming my own beliefs. Throughout the research process, I would actively seek non-conforming pieces of information in order to honor an open mind-set. Any time I encountered such information, I would ask myself how I justified the option out of the four options I had to my disposal, including discarding, adopting, synthesizing, or delaying the information. In this way, I tried to count for confirmation bias.

1.2 Roadmap

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter two discusses democratic schools in relation to the school's justice system. More specifically, I will address the Sudbury model because the participants of the study experienced this type of democratic school. In chapter three, I will elaborate on the theoretical foundations of my research which include a discussion nonviolent communication, retributive justice (RJ), restorative practices (RP), and classroom injustice. Chapter four examines narrative research as suitable methodological approach for this study. In chapter five, I will present my research findings. Chapter six will address the implications of the research findings. Then, I will continue with evaluation of this research in chapter 7 before I address the concluding remarks in the last chapter.

2 | Democratic Schools

"The judicial system was really important because it was so obviously justice that you were involved in... You knew how difficult it was. You were on both sides, or all sides, because you might be... a witness, or a complainant, or the alleged violator, or a member of the judicial committee."

-Alumna Sudbury Valley School, Kingdom of Childhood (1994, p. 203)

The dissatisfaction students, parents, and educators may experience with the current mainstream school practices has been recognized by some for decades. In the context of the free school movement, the alternative educationalists of the 1960's provided a compelling critique against the technocratic understanding of education, including writers such as Paul Goodman, John Holt, and Jonathan Kozol (Miller, 2000). Their main argument is that the American school system served "the interest of the state or economic system" while it neglected the happiness of the individual (Miller, 2000, p. 4). Some parents sought an alternative school that respected the values of "love, joy, passion, freedom and spontaneity" (Miller, 2000, p. 4). For example, the founders of the Sudbury Valley School (1968) were inspired by the oldest existing democratic school Summerhill, founded by A.S. Neill in 1921 (Hecht and Ram, 2008; H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018). Ninety-nine years later, Summerhill continues to inspire other democratic schools[1], being a living proof of a school which is organized on two democratic principles defined by the European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC) in 2005 (Eudec, 2020). The first principle is that students are primarily responsible for taking initiative to engage in activities. The second principle entails that the outcome of school policy and school rules are based on a set of rules ensuring a scrupulous democratic decision-making process. In the following sections I will further outline the key features of democratic practices at Summerhill and Sudbury Valley School.[2] Both these democratic schools developed a unique practice towards rule-breaking behavior.[3] Summerhill provides an understanding of the origins of democratic schooling, and the relation between student freedom and delinquency. The Sudbury Valley School developed unique school meeting practices and a judicial system to resolve issues of justice in their school. The discussion on the Sudbury Valley School helps us to better understand the experiences of the participants of

this research as they attended a school that adopted the Sudbury model.[4]

2.1 Summerhill

Democratic school founder A.S. Neill (1960) embraced Lane Homer's idea to cure children by giving unceasing "love and understanding" (p. 176). As early as 1913, superintendent Lane Homer understood that inflicting cruelty on children is ineffective if you wish to foster social behavior in delinquent children (Aldrich and Gordon, 1989, p. 145). Further, it requires something more than the absence of such cruelty. As superintendent of the Little Common Wealth (1913 – 1918) in Dorset, he set an example of what it means to act in freedom and self-government. He demonstrated how mutual trust and respect is expressed in behavior. This helped the "muggers, thieves, and gangsters" to reconnect with themselves in meaningful ways. In doing so, they became more social and responsible. To embody this ideal, Neill founded Summerhill in 1921. As principal of the school, he gave students the right to participate in community government, which both created an enriching education experience and a display of "adult trust and confidence" (Darling, 1992, p. 46). Neill pursued the idea that under the condition of freedom students of all ages will develop admirable character traits, such as "happiness, sincerity, balance and sociability" (Neill, 1960, p. 63). This provided a seemingly impossible challenge for Neill and the staff, as most students coming to Summerhill are the "boisterous" and "rebellious" ones. Nevertheless, having an interest in psychoanalysis, Neill adopted explanations for anti-social behavior other than concluding that these students are "bad" and therefore needed to be punished. For example, the student's act of breaking windows, was not about window breaking. It was a protest against adult authority. Window breakers were common. Using the tactic of doing the opposite of what is expected, Neill

[1]The current list of existing democratic schools internationally can be found on the website of Alternative Education Research Organisation (AERO) (AERO, 2020).

[2]In this chapter, I discuss democratic schools in relation with justice, as this is the focus of my research. In this research I assume that democratic schools can work for some students. Perhaps, for those who are unfamiliar with the concept of a democratic school, this assumption requires further explanation that goes beyond the scope of this research. This is the reason why I decided to provide some footnotes for further reading on issues that are related to democratic schools but not necessarily to justice.

[3]The term democratic school refers to a diverse set of democratic schools practices (Harmsen, 2016; Korkmaz and Erden, 2014). For the purposes of this research, I will focus on explaining the unique features of Summerhill and the Sudbury Valley School.

[4]To protect the anonymity of the Sudbury school of this research, I will only discuss the justice practice of the Sudbury Valley School. Over the years, the Sudbury model has been adopted in some other schools in the world (Feldman, 2001: Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). The discussion on the Sudbury Valley School will suffice to understand the stories the participants of the research tell about.

would join the fun of breaking windows, which was aimed to non-moralize the act of breaking windows (Neill, 1972, p. 103). What should be emphasized is that the freedom to break windows is no license for doing so. Summerhill student Vivien fended off Neill's complaint that Vivien broke the private property rule. The six-year-old argued that the rule didn't count because there was no school government in that period. Nevertheless, he admitted he would pay for the 17 windows he broke anyways (Neill, 1960, p. 18). The freedom described here is a shared distribution of rights, according to John Stuart Mill's understanding of freedom (Darling, 1992, p. 46). Essentially, the principle is that one's freedom ends once it infringes onto the freedom of another person. In other words, Neill would answer the question: "Is what Mr. X is doing really harmful to anyone else?" (Neill, 1968, p. 299). Further, it includes a liberation of the mind from the fear installed by disciplinarian acts and beliefs. Such fear includes the fear of ending up concluding that one has to hate oneself because one's bad behavior means that one is a bad person. Removing this mental restriction, means that it becomes safer to engage in self-reflection and sense-making. Thus, in a context of "trust, security, sympathy, lack of blame, and absence of judgement," students are more likely to search for the more profound reasons behind their own behavior, which encourages self-regulation and social behavior (Neill, 1960, p. 177).

Neill's practical approach to real life situations had its merits, though was not perfect. Neill distinguished the communal affairs from the organizational aspects of the school, which limited the areas on which children could decide on. Anything directly related to the relations among students and staff would be discussed in the weekly school meeting, including the settlement of quarrels and those that broke rules. According to visitor Mimsy Sadofsky (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018), making decisions in the group were done very quick. A brief statement of what had happened was enough "unless someone makes a big objection" (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018, p. 163). Besides the School Meetings, Neill held therapy sessions with students which were supposed to support them to become independent from their parents (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018, p. 126). Although he initially thought these therapy sessions helped to free the student, he later believed that Summerhill communities' approach to freedom was responsible for the liberation of students. On the organizational aspects of the school, Neill and his wife took the responsibility, including the appointment of staff, and domestic arrangements such as bedroom allocation. Further, for safety reasons, Neill was resolute in banning strong drinks and climbing the rooftop of the school. Darling (1992) argues that such practices are an indication of the limitations on equal power distribution among students and adults. For example, he questions whether it is justified that Neill is ultimately in charge of recruiting suitable staff, as his hiring and firing process arguably appeared to

be inconsistent. Neill would not have disagreed, as he was aware of some of his short comings. He reflected that he "hates playing God" and always felt "miserable and slightly guilty" if he did so (Neill, 1972, p. 101).

Despite of Neill's shortcomings, the essence of Summerhill's remarkable education philosophy could hardly be missed. Entering the school as a student meant that no individual community member can force another member to do or not do something. Instead, the community as a collective can do so. This is more accepted, as each community member has influence and carries responsibility for the outcome of the school meeting. The culture created was tangible. Such self-government closed the gap between generations. Authoritarian formality was replaced by respectful informality. Instead of addressing an adult with Mr. /Ms., children addressed Mr. Neill with "Neill Orange Peel," and their science teacher Mr. Corkhill with "Corkie" (Neill, 1972, p. 100). Further, Neill observed that the school produced some scholars, but also artists and other hard-working people (Neill, 1972). In his fifty years running the school, he claimed that he only knew "one old person who [couldn't] hold down a job" (Neill, 1972, p. 104). Nevertheless, he insisted that he cared less about the things people do. Rather, he would want the school to "produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar," and he was satisfied to see that the school had "not produced a street cleaner so far" (Neill, 1960, p. 14).

2.2 Sudbury Valley School

Different from Summerhill, Sudbury Valley School's founders Hannah and Daniel Greenberg disagreed with Neill about his idea that children had to hate their parents in order to become free from their influence (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018, p. 165). The couple and co-founding group believed that parents should be allowed to spend more time with their children and organically grow with their children's development. Hence, the school became a day school instead of a boarding school with students between ages four and nineteen. [5]

The Sudbury Valley School allowed more parent and student involvement and formalized its decision-making process. The JC and the School Meeting are two school organs that are responsible for making collective decisions and enforcement of the school's house rules. It models a participatory democracy in which community members make decisions by majority vote. The school meeting discusses the organization of group activities, alongside staff recruitment, school budget, clean-up schedules, student recruitment,

[5]The student population of the Sudbury Valley school fluctuated over the years. They started with about a hundred students in 1968 (D. Greenberg, 1973) and increased to 220 students in 2001 (Feldman, 2001).

learning facilities, arrangement of the school's physical property, and school rules (D. Greenberg and et. al., 2003; Korkmaz and Erden, 2014).[6] The school meeting can decide to delegate tasks to sub-committees such as the mainly student-led JC, which was invented in 1982 under the name Committee on School Affairs (CSA). The JC models a court with a committee, dealing with rulebreakers and conflicts (Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009). In essence, community members can file complaints against one another if they believe the other person broke a rule. In turn the JC will investigate the complaints every morning. Based on the evidence, the JC charges a violation of the rule or rules. The accused can plead guilty or not guilty. If the accused protests, he or she can take it to trial, which is a special school meeting with a jury. Those who broke rules that threaten the core rules of the school, will be taken to the school meeting as well. In this way, the power the JC holds has an upper limit. Unlike the court ruling in American society, the JC processes the complaints from the previous day every morning (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018), and the Judicial committee decides on the sanction that follows. The Sudbury Valley school decided to make these changes because of practicality, efficiency and fast processing. In this way the situations that need to be discussed are still fresh in the memories of those involved.

The JC's impact went far beyond the expectations of those who designed the system. It is "mind-boggling," said Hanna, "most members are there at 11:00 – whether you are a little six-year-old or a teenager" (H. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2018, p. 39). They would sit there as long as necessary to process all complaints, which sometimes took hours. In other cases, older students took the responsibility to lead younger and/or new students through the JC process. For example, the second-year student Erin (age 6) helped the new student Lisa (age 5), with her first complaint against her. Erin reassured her that JC clerks are "really nice and won't hurt" her (Feldman, 2001, p. 22). After Lisa confirmed she left her lunch out, the clerk explained to her that this is not allowed. A discussion among the JC clerks followed, and the clerk told Lisa that they decided she will receive a warning this time. Lisa signed the complaint and the two left. "They were nice!" whispered Lisa to Erin (Feldman, 2001, p. 22). Such situations shed light on the importance of how younger and older children can learn together (Gray, 2011a; Feldman, 1997).[7] Interestingly, the JC, a paper-based system, encourages the development of other practical skills, including literacy, debate and collaboration. Although a child would ask for help by filling in a complaint form, he or she rather wants to do it by him- or herself as soon as possible. Discussions on the notion of fairness, "one person's freedom versus

[6] As each school meeting member has equal vote, it implies that staff have equal rights to decision-making, and function as role model (D. Greenberg and et. al., 2003; D. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2009; Hartkamp-Bakker, 2009).

another person's freedom," and the collision of "different kinds of freedom," especially in controversial cases, are part of the many things students talk about (M. Greenberg, 2018, p. 81). The diverse background community members come from, encourage children to make sense of while building their mental map of how the world works (D. Greenberg, 2018a). Further, it means that students can experience different roles of responsibility, which appear to nurture a sense of confidence, passion, and commitment. Greenberg and Sadofsky (1992) observe that such experiences not only benefit those who grew up at Sudbury or stayed there for many years, but also those who attended only a year or less.[8]

2.3 Concluding Remarks

> *A visitor asked me to explain the difference between Summerhill and a Montessori school. My reply: 'A kid can say jack in Summerhill, but not in a Montessori school.' As long as parents and teachers insist on forming a child's character, all the free activity in the world will not produce free people.*
>
> - (Neill, 1972, p. 149)

The technocratic worldview underpinning standardized schooling left a significant group of educators, parents and students alienated from their needs. This included to feel socially connected, individually acknowledged and, ultimately, pursue the search for a meaningful life. Neill, a visionary who was ahead of his time, abandoned mainstream teacher practices, and attempted to build a school community based on self-government and freedom. His school Summerhill (1921) would become a source of inspiration for the Sudbury Valley School (1968). The Sudbury Valley school took the idea of freedom and democracy and developed it into a day school which has formalized procedures to deal with democratic decision-making and the breaking of school rules. The working of the JC highlights how students learn in relation to one another and from formalized decision-making procedures.

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[7]Some authors have written about how students learn at the Sudbury Valley school (Gray, 2011b; D. Greenberg, 2018a; D. Greenberg and et. al., 2003). They developed concepts such as the merit of age-mixed learning and play (Feldman, 1997; Gray, 2011a; Gray and Feldman, 2004).

[8]Some authors conducted research to Alumni of the Sudbury Valley school (D. Greenberg et al., 2005; D. Greenberg and et. al., 2003; D. Greenberg et al., 1994; D. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 1992). Some of those accounts address questions about high education admissions as well (D. Greenberg et al., 2005; D. Greenberg and Sadofsky, 1992).

3 | Theoretical Perspectives on Justice

"Social change involves helping people see new options for making life wonderful that are less costly to get needs met."
- Marshall B. Rosenberg

This chapter presents the framework of nonviolent communication (NVC) and discusses various perspectives on justice. Adopting the vocabulary of NVC serves several aims in this research. Firstly, NVC offers a nonjudgmental understanding on retributive and restorative justice because making claims on right and wrong are absent in this way of communicating. Secondly, the understanding of justice in NVC terms guides my interpretations of the participants' stories. Lastly, in doing so, it would meet my ethical aim to encourage empathy towards the students of this study and adults involved in schools.

3.1 Nonviolent Communication

Communication, language, and thought shape one's understanding of situations, including misbehavior and conflict on the one hand, and voluntary cooperation and feeling alive on the other. The vocabulary used to address and communicate one's displeasure or approval to another can be done in jackal and giraffe language (Rosenberg, 2015a; Baran, 1998). The well-respected mediator and author Rosenberg (2005a) explains that jackal language emphasizes words related to "judgment, fear, obligation, duty, punishment and reward, and shame" (loc. 255).[1] Such language makes it hard for us to connect with the other person in a joyful and empathetic manner. For instance, Rosenberg's oldest son Rick, with shoulder-length hair, came home from his first day of school, and told his father that one of his male teachers said to him, "My, my, look at the little girl" (Rosenberg, 2005b, loc. 131). It is hard to ignore the criticism, especially if one is not trained to put on giraffe ears. Rosenberg, concerned about what his son heard, asked him how he responded to that. "It was pretty obvious, dad. I heard that he was feeling irritated, and probably wanted to get my hair cut," he said (Rosenberg, 2005b, loc. 131). Continuing to address his feelings, Rick said, "Dad, I felt sad for the man. He was bald and seemed to have a problem about hair" (Rosenberg, 2005b, loc. 131). Giraffe vocabulary addresses what is in a person's heart, by listening to the underlying needs and feelings of the messages uttered. Translating jackal expressions into giraffe understanding replaces criticism with empathy and compassion. In other words, jackal messages, Rosenberg (2015b) explains, can be interpreted as a "suicidal expression" of the other person's need.

This implies that NVC goes beyond the techniques of communication and involves a broader issue of peaceful conflict resolution via nonjudgmental understanding.

Giraffe language or nonviolent communication (NVC), can be understood as an assertive language which reduces or dissolves the harm in confronting conflict. During a workshop for Montessori educators, Rosenberg (2005b) illustrates the process of nonviolent education via teacher FP who stopped Filip, a three-year-old child, from grabbing and choking a five-year-old (loc. 517). Entering the process of NVC involves the communication of the message that the behavior observed is "the most wonderful thing in the world that they could be doing" (Rosenberg, 2005b, loc. 517). If communicated successfully, the other person can lower their defenses and offenses, which creates space to explore alternatives. Further, if the objective is to get people to do what you want, it is not NVC. Instead, the objective is to find a solution in which all needs get an opportunity to be met. In this case, it is about the quality of the connection. According to Rosenberg's experience, sticking to the process, often if not always, results in a creative solution where all needs are met (Rosenberg, 2015b).

The actual process involves the following four steps. Firstly, observations replace diagnoses and labels. In this example, "the grabbing by the throat" and "choking" are the identifiable behaviors. Notice how this is different from labeling the behavior as "murdering," which implies killing with malicious intent and worthy of blame (Merriam-Webster, 2020). The second and third step replaces judgments with feelings and needs. Judging the behavior as bad or wrong makes it hard to establish the human connection in both directions. Instead, the teacher could ask Filip, "Do you feel sad because you want to play with the other kids and they won't let you?" (Rosenberg). It would be different if the teacher would ask, "Do you feel frustrated because you want to play with the ball and you cannot?" Here, "to play with the ball" is a strategy to meet a need rather than a need itself. It is one of the many ways that could fulfill a more fundamental need, namely that of connecting with others. In cases where the needs and feelings are not clear, it can take a couple of turns according to Rosenberg (Rosenberg.[2] Further, Rosenberg (2015a) attends the reader that different kinds of interpretations of the same behavior result in different kinds of feelings. Hence, the way one feels is no one else's responsibility but one's own. Additionally, it is important that the teacher makes sure the child understand the teacher's feelings and needs as well. The message would not have reached the child if the teacher said, "I am concerned because I have a need to protect the other children's safety" and the child heard, "she said I shouldn't do that." Fourthly, requests replace demands. Having figured out and communicated the behavior, feelings, and needs, it is

[1]Sometimes the term location (loc) is used in e-books instead of page numbers. See list of abbreviations.

necessary to make a request on what one would like the other person to do. In this case, the teacher could say, "I would like you to teach you how to ask for the ball in giraffe, and see how that works out for you. How about that?" In this way, Rick's need to be listened to by other kids would be met, while the teacher's need for safety can be fulfilled.

The four elements of behavior, feelings, needs and requests can be used to give healthy compliments to one another that celebrate life. Telling someone else what they are is not a compliment, as it tends to reduce the other person to an inanimate object. In addition, Kohn (1999) would argue that compliments as rewards distract one from challenging oneself and engaging in open exploration. Hence, rewards or compliments do not add any information or value, like calling someone brilliant. When a mother in one of Rosenberg's workshops called him that, he helped her rephrasing it in NVC. What this mother actually meant was that two of Rosenberg's comments (behavior/action), which she showed to him, inspired her to use different words in her communication with her son (strategy), resulting in a closer relationship she longed for (need), and felt relieved (feeling). she was grateful that Rosenberg inspired her to create this experience for herself. This reveals much about the purpose of NVC. It is a language that facilitates giving for the sake of feeling satisfied in doing so and makes life more wonderful for yourself and others.

Furthermore, Rosenberg (2015a) explains the difference between power over someone and power with someone. To understand the difference, Rosenberg suggest that one considers answering two questions (p. 217). Firstly, what would you like the other person to do? And secondly, for what reason would you like the other person to do it? If the answer to the latter question is "you do this or else," then this person is using force. What is asked has become a demand as 'no' is not an option anymore for the person receiving the demand. Such involuntary action may be met with rebellion or submission. For example, if a teacher asked a student to throw away the trash next to the student, the question is whether the student heard it as a demand or request. Does the student hear "you do it, because the teacher said so" or "you do it, because it makes sense to share the collective responsibility of cleaning the school." In the former, the student hears power over him. In the latter, the student hears power with the teacher. Which of the two will be depends on how the teacher deals with a student's no: can the student opt out safely if he or she decides to not fulfill the request of the teacher? As teacher, standing above the student in terms of authority position, may easily force the student to do it anyways. In such case, everyone involved will probably pay for it: the student did not learn to do it for the right reasons which makes it more likely the student will continue to litter if no

[2]For a full list, see appendix B.

authority figure is watching. This implies that feelings of satisfaction or frustration are interwoven in the perception whether needs are met or not, of which we all are part of.

Therefore, through the lens of nonviolent communication, students' perceptions of justice can be understood in a more compassionate way for students, readers, teachers, and school administrators. In this way, NVC could provide a suitable bridge between the various opinions people have about justice in school.

3.2 Effects of Retributive Justice in School

The adoption of harsh punitive measurements such as zero-tolerance policies to counter misbehavior made an odd introduction in American schools. The zero tolerance approaches adopted by attorneys for public drug use regulation in 1988 were based on military practices as early as 1983 (R. Skiba and Peterson, 1999). Although such public programs were quietly dropped because of public controversy that led the American Civil Liberties Unions to consider a lawsuit against the program in the 1990s, the first report of zero-tolerance policies in school was in 1989. More problematically, by 1993 more school boards started to implement zero-tolerance policies. By the end of the 1990s a mounting pile of research evinces that such emphasis on punishment in school has resulted in undesirable effects (Kohn, 1999; R. Skiba and Peterson, 1999), which necessitated educators and school boards to search for alternatives (Fronius et al., 2016; Losen, 2014). Noticeably, the academic literature on retributive and its alternative restorative justice focuses on the level of school policy and implementation, using mainly quantitative methods of analysis. In this section I will first discuss retributive justice, followed by its alternative, restorative practices.

Punishment or retribution as justice concepts can be understood as an influential element in bringing justice. Daly (2016) argues that retributive justice and the conventional criminal justice system are often confused with one another. Retributive justice refers to the punitive aim of a justice outcome in western conventional court, which is only one of the many aims and outcomes it can have, including restoration and rehabilitation (Daly, 2001). Additionally, researcher Walen (2014) explains that a punishment is only justified if 1) the offender morally deserves to suffer a proportionate punishment; 2) the punisher has the moral authority to do so; and 3) the punisher does not give disproportionate punishments or punish the innocent. The punishment itself can be defined as 1) the infliction of some hardship, 2) done intentionally, 3) to signal condemnation towards, 4) the wrongful act (Walen, 2014). While retribution is an aim, western conventional criminal justice courts include other justice mechanisms, such as "prosecution, adjudication and trial," sentencing, and victim impact statements (Daly, 2016, p. 15). Hence, retribution can be

understood as one of the many elements that a system bringing justice could incorporate. Nevertheless, it is understandable to confuse retribution as a justice aim with a broader conception of justice. For example, researcher Hopkins (2002) agrees with Zehr's understanding of retributive justice as a distinct paradigm (p. 144). Zehr's (2015) paradigm is characterized with 1) blame and guilt playing a role in 2) determining the punishment, which is supposed to 3) signal accountability as response to rule-breaking behavior. The emphasis on 4) rule compliance, enforced by 5) school staff appear to 6) replace one social injury with another. Further, Rosenberg (2005a) observes that western countries developed an elaborate vocabulary and conceptual understanding of retribution, pervading daily communication. Hence, people have developed an elaborate vocabulary for morality, shame and blame, and punishment. Thus, the aim of retribution appears to pervade the vocabulary used throughout a justice system.

Researchers have argued that a justice approach emphasizing punishment has been ineffective and even harmful. Skiba and Peterson (1999) illustrate the negative effects of a disproportionate punishment between an offence done and punitive measurements taken. For example, in 1998 a school principal and fourteen seventh- and eighth graders went to Paris and sipped a drop of wine as part of the cultural program. Back in Cherry Creek, Colorado, it was understood as breaking the rule supposed to reduce alcoholism, and as a result, the principal was banned from and relocated to another school district (R. Skiba and Peterson, 1999, p. 5). Further research on zero-tolerance policies indicate that these policies tend to push out students from school, while not showing an effect on school safety (Fronius et al., 2016; Force et al., 2008). Worse, suspension and expulsion is linked to lower academic performance, drop-out, and failure to graduate (Losen, 2014). If a school's policy involves the police in misbehavior at school, it led to an increasing number of students following the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Petrosino et al., 2012). Further, the punishments given, appear to statistically disadvantage people of color (R. J. Skiba et al., 2000). Thus, disproportional sanctions have been ineffective and harmful to the student.

From a compassionate, nonjudgmental perspective, Rosenberg would argue that there are feelings and needs one could empathize with underlying the zero tolerance policies. Indeed, Skiba and Peterson (1999) explain that in the 1990s, there was a fear of random violence and a need for safety. The choice for the ineffective/harmful zero tolerance policy as a strategy for satisfying that need, can be understood as a tragic and failed expression of that need. In turn, students' sense of safety may have been affected - the fear of getting expelled because of the smallest mistake done. If not suspended, students may notice the power exercised over them: "you do not do this or else." In case of expulsion, the sense of injustice may overwhelm the message of safety. In other words, the zero-tolerance policy

misses the point of signaling a message of safety and support to students.

3.3 Restorative Justice as Alternative

Recognizing that zero tolerance approaches of the 1990s did not work as intended, educators and policy makers looked for alternative practices. This included the exploration and experimentation of restorative justice in schools (Fronius et al., 2016). Daly (2016) argues that restorative justice could function as a truth seeking mechanism, rather than a full-fledged criminal justice system. Hence it is often practiced alongside a conventional criminal justice system (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). Activities embodying restorative justice activities can vary in forms, including formal or informal meetings with varying sets of stakeholders (Daly, 2016). Based on RJ practices, restorative practices have been developed for the school context (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). RP can involve reactive practices including formal meetings after a transgression (Kehoe et al., 2018). RP can adopt more holistic whole school approaches as well, including teachers using effective language and circle time in which a teacher and his/her students have the possibility to speak and listen (Kehoe et al., 2018, p. 192). What restorative justice and restorative practices have in common is the underlying philosophy that emphasizes dialogue, and the reparation and maintenance of social bonds among school community members (Fronius et al., 2016; Hopkins; Kehoe et al., 2018).

Additionally, the aim underlying restorative practice influences the judicial process in school in terms of interpretations made and vocabulary used. The aim of reintegration of victim and perpetrator into the community encourages affective language use, such as NVC. The communication of crucial information on needs, feelings and nonjudgment interpretations of situations increase the chance to connect and respond compassionately to one another (Baran, 1998). In the restorative practice framework, an emphasis is placed on the emotional, mental and/or physical harm done, which is addressed in a dialogue form between the different parties involved. The goal of such dialogue is to problem-solve how feelings and needs can be met in the future, re-conciliate the involved parties, and learn from the situation (Zehr, 2015). Hence, some researchers would interpret the aim of restorative practices as a profound change in framework compared to the aim of retributive justice practices (Hopkins; Zehr, 2015; Weaver and Swank, 2020; Hopkins, 2002; Zehr, 2015).

The potential effects of restorative practices in school appear positive. The concept of restorative practice has been well-practiced in schools in New Zealand and Australia for the last few decades (Fronius et al., 2016). From there, restorative practices in schools have been researched in different countries, including the United States (Fronius et al.,

2016), United Kingdom (McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008), New Zealand (Wearmouth et al., 2007; Drewery, 2007), and Australia (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005). Some researchers found that a well-implemented RJ system in schools reduced school suspension and expulsion significantly (Armour, 2012; Baker, 2009; Davis, 2014). Others report a reduction of violence in school (Lewis et al., 2013; McMorris et al., 2013). Additionally, absenteeism appeared to be reduced (Baker, 2009; Jain et al., 2014). Further, researchers found that staff reported an overall improvement of the school climate in terms of safety, support and nurturance (McMorris et al., 2013). Lastly, it appears to positively influence academic outcomes (McMorris et al., 2013), although more research on this topic is needed.

This discussion on retributive and restorative justice suggests that we need to be careful with how much weight we give to the element of retribution in the execution of justice. Punishment has been used as a mean in terms of installing fear and submission (Giorgi, 2001; Staub, 2003). Intentionally aiming to cause emotional or physical pain to someone can be understood as a form of violence. Violence is an expression of life against itself as it threatens a person's perception of safety. This type of violence is what a community tries to ban from its daily activities and interactions. Whether a perpetrator commits a violent act or a rightful discipliner exercices a punishment on a perpetrator is hardly different from one another in terms of installing fear and submission. In other words, punitive measurements do not seem to meet the need for safety. According to Rosenberg (2005a), violence begets violence. Hence, it appears that punitive strategies have not worked well if the aim is to foster self-regulation by allowing people to engage in pro-social behavior for the right reasons. Instead, it seems to be of tremendous value for developing healthy social relationships if you are able to interpret your environment as safe and experiencing the personal power to maintain the safety for yourself and community members. Various concepts and approaches have been developed to establish such a system, including the language of nonviolent communication and restorative justice as a mechanism.

3.4 Classroom Injustices

This review on the literature of classroom injustices shows that little is known about justice from the perspective of primary and high school students. Some researchers studied injustices students perceived on the classroom level. Interestingly, it seems that most researchers adopted quantitative measurements to study mainly university students' perception of injustices.

Much of the research on students' conception of justice is located in the field of psychology and education. Many of these scholars conceptualized perceived injustice in terms of

procedural and distributive justice (Chory-Assad, 2002; Israelashvili, 1997; Pretsch et al., 2016; Tata, 1999; Yeager et al., 2017). Perceived procedural injustice happens when the decision on the process of resource distribution seems to be unjust. For example, "students motivation, affective learning and likelihood of aggression against the instructor" increased when students perceived the procedures as unfair, including "attendance policy, schedules, grading scales, conduct, expectations and course syllabus" (Chory-Assad, 2002, p. 67). Perceived distributive injustices occur when produced outcomes are perceived as unfair, for example unfair grading outcomes. Few researchers included other conceptualizations of injustice, including retributive injustice, relational injustice, and deprivation (Israelashvili, 1997; Resh and Sabbagh, 2014; Resh, 1999). Other researchers explored different conceptualizations of injustice, including interactional injustice, systematic ethnic injustice and moral exclusion (Chory-Assad and Paulsel, 2004; Opotow et al., 2005; Schmader et al., 2001;). These scholars often use quantitative research methods for addressing perceived classroom injustices. Fewer researchers studied student's coping mechanisms in situations of perceived injustice. One of the few studies studied doctoral students coping with racism which reveals that seeking external responses to racism is likely to be arduous, including filing complaints and reconstructing committees (Truong and Museus, 2012). Indeed, studies on student coping behavior and perceived injustice, and in specific, discrimination, show an absence of formalized and constructive coping practices other than finding therapy and support groups (Donat et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2013; Schmader et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2007; Villegas-Gold and Yoo, 2014). Hence it seems that student's coping mechanisms in the face of injustices in a formal learning setting are individualistic in approach.

Further, it appears that student's limited opportunity to affect their situation with regard to justice, can shape their experience at school negatively. In high school, students that violate school policy, implying an act that does injustice to one's peers or teacher run the risk of expulsion, which often harms the school atmosphere and perpetrator (Brown, 2007). Some researchers who studied primary and high school students' feeling of injustice argue that these negative experiences can be related to societal issues and feelings of disempowerment (Israelashvili, 1997; Pretsch et al., 2016; Resh, 1999; Resh and Sabbagh, 2014). Only a handful of researchers have studied successful formal interventions that increased the feelings of fairness and engagement in school (Flecha and Soler, 2013; Feldman, 2001). That these feelings of injustice are part of students' experience from a young age which may be perpetrated throughout their academic career. This indicates the significance of studying the phenomenon of students' perception of injustice.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the aim of this theoretical framework on justice used in school has implications for the social relationships developed and maintained among school community members. School policies in which the aim of retribution is emphasized, for example in zero tolerance policies, appears to harm students and be ineffective in reducing the undesired behavior. School policies in which restorative justice is adopted as a framework seem to have promising effects on students, as research suggests that it can reduce misbehavior and improve social relations between and among students and staff.

In this chapter, I have provided a literature review on the research done on justice in school, which constitutes the theoretical lens of this research, and influences my research in multiple ways. First, the understanding of nonviolent communication provides a foundation, which unites two ways of interpreting situations involving conflict. This is helpful for understanding the current literature from a slightly different perspective. While pain can be understood in terms of retribution, deserving, and blame/shame, which appears to be a widespread practice, it can be understood in terms of feelings and needs as well. The shift in conceptualization is embodied in the shift from retributive to restorative justice practices in school. Interestingly, the different vocabulary used to understand and act towards misbehavior reveals the subjective nature of justice. What we appear to agree on is that the vocabulary and strategy chosen should 'work' as intended. The exploration of the various perspectives on justice has guided but not predefined my data analysis. Secondly, my theoretical framework illuminates something about the distribution of power among community members. While in a retributive framework, often the authority figure makes decisions, during restorative meetings more parties are involved and given the opportunity to speak and listen. Lastly, I will argue that the literature discusses little about the different structures of influence between a student's perception and justice. Only few researches adopted qualitative methods specifically designed to understand school justice from a student's perspective.

4 | Narrative Approach

4.1 Narrative Inquiry

"A good interpretation of anything - a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society - takes us into the heart of that of which it is an interpretation."
- Geertz, 1973, 18.

Communicating with other people and to ourselves about our understandings of our experience is part of living our daily lives. Examples of what is communicated include stories about our lives, excuses, and fairy tales. Such narrative schemes have helped people to make their "lives coherent, understandable, and meaningful" (Atkinson, 1998; May, 2012). According to Polkinghorne (1988) narrative can be better understood as a verb. The difference between the activity of writing and the manuscript produced illustrates this point (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 4). Engaging in the act of narration has been done throughout human history, as it has been an effective means to transmit wisdom, values, and knowledge from generation to generation (Anderson, 2018; Apfelbaum, 2000). While meaning is often understood in terms of linguistic expression (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988), it can take form in other expressions as well (Bold, 2011; Clandinin, 2006). According to Bold (2011), it could include "drawings, plays, video recordings, and ad hoc conversations" (p. 22). Further, Bruner (1991) observes that narrations accrue over time (p. 18). Experiences in our individual lives accumulate and convert into an autobiography that can be told. In the context of society, its collective experience converts into loosely defined "culture," "history," or "tradition" (Bruner, 1991, p. 18). Thus, narration is an integral part of the social, meaning making world, in which both the acts of narrating and the artifacts of narration can be observed, participated in, and studied.

Researchers studying narrative material generally share the understanding that human activities of meaning making differentiate people from the natural world, which include other living organisms and inanimate object (Polkinghorne, 1988). According to Polkinghorne (1988) both organic and "meaning structures" affect a person's course of action (p. 4). On the one hand, both the person's body and any other physical object would fall at the same accelerated speed. Our sensory apparatus mediates between the world out there, and the information we pick up. On the other hand, the meaning a person assigns to actions and events can affect their feelings and motivations. As a result, it can affect a person's course of decision-making. Therefore, in contrast to the natural world which is

seemingly governed by mathematical laws, the social world appears to be driven by the meaning making activities people engage in as well (Atkinson, 1998, p. 58).

Articulating meanings involves the use of narrations. In the field of narrative research, definitions of the terms narrative, stories, and life stories can differ (Bold, 2011; Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Some researchers understand narratives as discourses (Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1986), while historians and theologians would define narratives as "human activities" (Bold, 2011, p. 17). What is produced is called a story (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 2). It appears that the way researchers have defined narration depends on which aspect the researcher is interested in and focuses on with regard to the narrative material collected. In my research, I agree with the Polkinghorne's idea that narration is an activity. As a result of this, I understand the term narration as the articulation of an experience. What is produced from this activity is what I call a story or life story. In my research, I will use the term stories to refer to situations and events the research participants explain. The term life story is the story that emerges from the smaller stories that happen in the lives of participants. Thus, while narration refers to the activity of articulating experience, the story and life story refers to the outcome produced from narration.

The distinction between narration and story illuminates something about the nature of stories. The experience participants talk about can be small, like actions, situations, and events. The experience is first mediated by our sensory apparatus. With regard to my research, I focus on the linguistic expression of this experience. In doing so, I acknowledge that the language used can stylize or/and obscure the experience lived. This reveals even more the subjectivity involved on the level of words and sentences. For example, a simple term such as 'school' can evoke different mental images for different people living in different settings. Further, according to Polkinghorne (1988) different relationships can be formed between the sign and its referent, including the icon in which the sign resembles its referent, the index in which the sign indicates something about its referent, and the symbol in which the sign is arbitrarily chosen to refer to its referent (p. 5). The difference can be understood as the following. While figure 4.1 is an icon to resemble school, the book could be understood as an index for school. The word "school" is made of six letters, which have been arbitrarily chosen to refer to sounds, that create the overall sound "school." Hence, the letters, and the word "school" can be understood as symbols which we in turn associate with the conception of school. To mitigate this issue inherent to language, other words can be used to contextualize and detail the meaning intended. Nevertheless, there is still the risk of miscommunication, which is an inherent limitation of using language as a medium to express meaning (Pennycook, 2018).

Figure 4.1: Sign resembling school

Figure 4.2: Sign indicating school

Subjectivity in narratives can be further grasped by underscoring some of its particular characteristics, including its temporal nature, possible non-linear interpretations, and context. People produce narrations in a specific location and time, which characterizes the temporal nature of narrations (Bold, 2011; Bruner, 1991). As Bold agrees with Cortazzi that even though events can be placed in sequential order, the inference of causation and human interest in the narrative can inevitably change over time (Bold, 2011). Secondly, throughout the narrations, participants may include non-linear understandings of time, including flash backs, flash forwards and reinterpretations of a past event (Bruner, 1991, p. 3). Thirdly, researchers have increasingly paid more attention to the role of context in narratives (Mishler, 1986). People interact with the features of their specific contexts, including the social and cultural. These interactions are referred back to during their narrations. Attempting to decontextualize interpretations of stories may fail to grasp certain meanings relevant to one's research (Atkinson, 1998; Bold, 2011; Clandinin, 2006; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). Thus, the associations and connections people make when engaging with their inner lives are complex in nature.

Further, the research on narratives grapple with another specific symbolic quality of social life. Narrative researchers generally agree with the fact that a reported experience in the form of an interview and interview transcript cannot merely be understood as a passive, direct understanding of social reality. Instead, researchers agree that people, in this case both researcher and participants, actively create, organize, redefine, and relive their narrations (Bold, 2011; Bruner, 1991; Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1986; Paradis, 2019; Polkinghorne, 1988; Rosenthal, 1993). The manner the narrator adopts may be influenced by cultural norms around storytelling, the level of command over the language, and ability to adopt literary devices. For example, while western cultures prefer a clear begin, middle, and end, native Indian stories emphasizes the middle, without clear beginnings and endings (Delpit, 2006). In an interview setting, Ferrarroti (1981) observes that a narrator's decision on the structure of stories and stories told depends on one's relationship with its listener. A narrator's sensitivity to who is listening, which questions are asked, and conversation setting shape the way stories are told (Clandinin, 2006; Mishler, 1986). To illustrate, the same interview with a different interviewer could yield a different set of qualitative data (Clandinin, 2006). Additionally, Lieblich (1998) observes that different researchers' interpretations of the same interview transcripts yield differ-

ent results as well. This implies that narrative materials or stories do not merely reflect social reality. Instead, the participant as narrator imparts meaning onto their experience. In turn, the researcher as narrator of one's research imparts meaning on the participant's articulated meaning of the experience. Indeed, according to Spector-Mersel (2010) the telling of stories entails an "enormous power to shape reality" (p. 208). Thus, stories and the research on stories contain complex interpretive feedback loops that interact with social reality.

Adequately researching the inner world of people's everyday life requires an emphasis on relatability and reflectiveness, rather than seeking an objective truth (Paradis, 2019). As Biesta (2010) explains Dewey's conceptions on truth and knowledge, Dewey understood truth as something that only exists within its context. The experience of a person is equally 'true' from the person's firsthand perspective. Whether that truth or understanding of the situation works in other social contexts is a different matter for Dewey. In the context of narrative research, the implication is that the story of participants is not about whether what they say is correct or not. It is rather about understanding their perspective of the topic researched from their particular context, allowing for unexpected turns, diversity in perspectives, and multiple layers of meaning. The overall focus of this narrative research can be understood from Lieblich's categorization of narrative research. Lieblich et al. (1998) directs the attention on whether a study focusses more at the formal aspects of the story, for example the use of linguistic devices, or at the contents of the story (p. 13). On the other dimension the researcher can ask oneself whether one is more interested in the process that unfolds in the story (holistic) or in capturing a certain understanding of a topic (categorical). In my research, I situate my research along the dimensions of holistic/categorical content analysis, because I as researcher am more interested in the content of stories. To capture both personal development in the holistic life story and a more snapshot of how the participants of this research understand issues of justice, I use different methods to analyze the data, as I will explain in section 4.3.

4.2 Data Collection

The focus I used for participant selection went through a reflective process. Firstly, one of the reasons why I wanted to study this specific group of students who experienced both mainstream schools and Sudbury schools is because these students have likely experienced deviancy. Staff from Sudbury schools observed that a part of their student population are students who got stuck in the mainstream school system for some reason (Greenberg and Sadofsky, 2009). This experience is not different from the Dutch situation, as confirmed in personal communications with staff from the Sudbury schools involved in this study. From a research perspective, deviant behavior is enriching as it reveals

more about social reality. As Rosenthal explained, it is important to "find people who do not obey the rules" (Breckner and Massari, 2019, p. 176). Secondly, in collaboration with the contact person at Sudbury schools, we discussed about the appropriate characteristics of possible research participants. We decided that students should at least have attended a Sudbury school for one year. In such a period or longer it is more likely that students have gained a meaningful relationship with a Sudbury school setting (Greenberg et al., 2005). Because of the small number of students who attended these Sudbury schools, there was little choice with regard to the other relevant participant characteristics as mentioned in figure 4.1. Subsequently, I selected the participants based on their willingness to participate and availability. As a result of this, there is much variation in these characteristics as displayed in figure 4.1. This is not a problem for my research as I am interested in the diversity of perspectives on justice and injustice at school. Four students ended up participating in this research. Interestingly, it turned out that those who were informed about my research project and wanted to participate, fit the student population who got stuck in mainstream schools.

Table 4.1: Student Characteristics

Pseudonym	Rob	Anna	Luuk	Bram
Age	25	20	18	20
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Male
Years at mainstream schools (MS)	Age 5-15	Age 5-15	Age 5-12	Age 5-17
Reasons to leave RS and start at SS	Demotivated	Burn-out	Expelled from school after a suicide attempt	Demotivated
Years at the Sudbury schools (SS)	2	1	4	2
Their current/ future plans	Recruitment Consultant	Student Graphic Design	DS student, Studying to become a programmer	Studying to Enter University
Interviews (I) 2019 in minutes	I1, W44: 58 I2, W46: 64	I1, W45: 40 I2, W46: 66	I1, W41: 62 I2, W43: 56	I1, W42: 65 I2, W43: 59

During weeks (W) in November and December 2019 I collected two semi-structured interviews per participant. I offered the participants two questions to help them think

about their school experiences as preparation for the interview. The first question was "How does your life look like so far? Place these experiences on a timeline." The second question was "What are the moments at school that you remember most?" The aim of this exercise was to help them refresh their memory and feel comfortable during the interview. Prior to the first interview I prepared questions including those about school, their family and themselves, which can be found in appendix D. The interviews took place over a recorded video-call (Skype and zoom) as I was in Finland and the research participants lived in the Netherlands. The conversations went as planned, despite the occasional interruptions due to loss of internet connection. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, because this is the native language for both me, the interviewer, and interviewees. During the interview, I would let the interviewee guide their narrative and ask follow-up questions. I would only propose a new topic or question when they finished the story they wanted to tell. Within a few weeks after the first interview, I conducted the second. For the second interview, I went through the interview transcripts of the first interview, and prepared questions about aspects of their stories I wanted to know more about. I used these prompts for continuing the conversation. In all the interviews I would make supporting comments and asked mainly open, follow-up and clarification questions, to encourage sharing (Clandinin, 2006, p. 156).

During the interview, I kept some interview guidelines in mind to ensure appropriate communication. I agree with Josselson's notion (2006) that the researcher's intention and actions should align with "the ethics of care rather than rights" (p. 540). Brené Brown underscores the aspect of caring as well. She suggests that "sharing yourself to teach or move a process forward can be healthy and effective" (Brown, 2015, p. 161). This may be more challenging in situations where participants share difficult and/or painful experiences in which the role of researcher and therapist may become unclear (Breckner and Massari, 2019; Clandinin, 2006). Rosenthal (2019) reflects that in such situations, she wants to be "in the first place human, wondering how far [she] can help" (p. 170). Hence, it is not necessary to avoid the discussion of challenging experiences. In fact, Josselson adds that talking about painful experiences can still be ethical under the conditions that the participant wants to talk about it voluntarily, and the interviewer is "qualified to listen and contain a wide range of human experience" (p. 544). In other words, this advice emphasizes the principles of doing no harm (Clandinin, 2006, p. 537), and communicating in a way that works towards a constructive, meaningful and mutually beneficial encounter.

Further, throughout the interview I took into account that the researcher is implicated in the construction of the interview. I as researcher am not merely collecting stories. Instead, the interviewer's role of asking questions and listening contributes to the way the

participant constructs the stories. For example, if I noticed that a participant felt hesitant to continue their narrative, I would try to find out what was behind that. Sometimes it would be the case they rather not wanted to talk about a topic or were thinking about what I wanted to hear. In such situations I would remind them in a friendly way that they are free to talk or not talk about a topic in the way they want to talk about it, regardless of my research aims. In the context of their school culture in which the discussion of rules regulating behavior is central, my explicit supportive statements were received appreciatively. This could be understood as an illustration of how my research intention shaped the co-creating relationship and the learning space throughout the conversation (Clandinin, 2006).

4.3 Data Analysis

I started the analysis process by transcribing the interviews. My interest in the contents rather than the formal linguistic aspects of the stories guided the transcription process. I decided to include utterances like 'uh,' the moments they laughed, and repetitions in the transcriptions. These where helpful during the analysis process as they reminded me of the meaning reflected in the participants' non-linguistic expressions.

For the data analysis, I used two different methods of data analysis. To interpret each participant's life story, I used the analysis of critical incidents. This method underscores the interpretation of the situations critical to the life story of the participants. I used this analysis to answer the first sub-research question about the relationship between student's notion of justice and significant turning points in their lives, which may shed light on the reasons and motivations behind their behavior. The second analysis I used is qualitative content analysis. This analysis reveals more about the students' perception of what justice and injustice is in the context of school, which answers the second sub-research question. The two methods of analysis complement each other. The critical incidents analysis of the participants' life stories situates their perception of justice in the way life unfolds for them. In this way, more recurring themes, and striking features of the data can be revealed, which enriches the understanding of how the perspectives of students on justice issues impact their lives.

4.3.1 Critical Incident Analysis

Using the analysis of critical incidents serves several research aims. Firstly, critical incident analysis is a tool that helps the researcher to interpret the significance of a situation. Secondly, the analysis allows for the introduction of the participants' life stories holistically. In turn, this contextualizes their understanding of justice for the reader, and

how these understandings inform their motivations for the course of actions they took throughout their period at school. Now I will turn to the features of critical incident analysis and discuss its application in this research.

Tripp's understanding of critical incidents as situations or happenings that mark major "turning points or changes" in a person's life has been widely accepted among teacher education researchers (Angelides, 2001, p. 432; Cite et al., 2017; Halquist and Musanti, 2010; Haynes and Murris, 2011; Savva, 2015). While some researchers describe it as "vivid happenings," or everyday events with "enormous consequences" (Halquist and Musanti, 2010, p. 450), others would describe it more specifically as a gap "between values and action" (Haynes and Murris, 2011, p. 293). Angelides (2001) adds that these incidents encourage "further reflection or finding solutions", which may not always be obvious at the moment in which a critical incident occurs (p. 431). According to Savva (2015) critical incidents are a type of learning that is unplanned or informal in nature. Hence, it is possible that the criticality of the incident may be noticed only after the occurrence of the event (Haynes and Murris, 2011). In other words, the researcher literally creates critical incidents depending on the way the researcher justifies his/her selection (Angelides, 2001; Halquist and Musanti, 2010).

Subsequently, the creation of critical incidents requires the researcher to notice the connection between the situation as mentioned by a participant and its impact on the overall life story of a participant. Critical incidents can be identified from a participant's and researcher's perspective. From a participant's perspective, the criticality of a situation can be argued by the fact that he or she remembered the situation and find it worth recounting during the interview (Savva, 2015). From a researcher's perspective, an incident is critical if a researcher can plausibly argue that a situation could be an indication for the "underlying trends, motives and structures" of a participant's life story (Angelides, 2001; Haynes and Murris, 2011). Indeed, in my research I included both critical incidents that are dramatic, life changing events, and those smaller ones which led up to and were the result of that dramatic turning point in the lives of participants. The smaller critical incidents are meant to underscore experiences that reveal some aspects of structurally reoccurring situations involving an issue of justice which students dealt with during their time at school. During the analysis process I took the following steps in reconstructing life stories from a critical incident analysis perspective. Because each transcript was about thirty pages, I identified the stories a participant told per page. Then, I placed these stories in a chronological order from situations that happened in childhood to the present moment. I would add possible interpretations of how the situations they talked about could be connected to one another. Next, I went over these stories and started to color-code the situations I recognized to be critical incidents and situations that involved

issues of justice. Analysing the data in these two ways simultaneously, allowed me to notice were critical incidents and issues of justice may or may not intersect. During the process I did more detailed analyses in which I explored how I justified my interpretation of a situation I understood to be critical. These steps have been the basis for my qualitative content analysis as well. I would reflect on the commonalities I found among the situations that could be interpreted as critical and find suitable criteria for critical incidents that were tailored to the context of my research. I used the following Criteria to find the critical incidents in the participants' stories.

- Situations that indicate how the person decided differently compared to the way the person made decisions in his or her past.
- Situations that tell something about the next course of action and decision-making.
- Situations that encourage the participant towards a course of action, which resulted in a transformative experience for the person.

The process of categorization, reflecting on the underlying criteria, and in-depth analysis was a cyclic process.

4.3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The aim of qualitative content analysis (QCA) in this research is to describe the features that characterize student's conception of justice and injustice in a systematic way. QCA acknowledges the interpretative nature of analyzing personal meanings that are present in interview transcripts (Flick et al., 2004; Schreier, 2012). To describe the less obvious or latent meaning of justice and injustice from an individual's perspective, researcher Margrit Schreier (2012) suggests taking several main features of QCA into account, including its systematic nature, ability to reduce data, and emphasis on validity.

Firstly, researchers working with QCA agree that the method follows a sequence of analysis steps that are often repeated in a cyclic manner (Flick et al., 2004; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012). Mayring (2004) suggests that the researcher should justify the appropriateness of the research question, the coding frame, and the data used. The researcher gradually builds his or her coding frame up to "10-50 percent" of the data and checks whether the frame needs some adjustment. This process will be repeated until all relevant data is coded and the researcher decides to move on to the final stage of processing the data and checking whether the frame captures the meaning. Having the possibility to adapt the framework during the analysis process means that QCA is a flexible and systematic approach to data analysis. The analysis of my data proceeded as the following. For the critical incident analysis I created a summary of each story in the transcript which included the page number where I could find it back. Next, I put those

summarized stories in chronological order for each participant. Based on this document, I highlighted the stories and situations that involved the theme of justice issues. The situations or stories I included were those in which students perceived it to be just or unjust, those that could be interpreted as a justice issue based on the theoretical framework of this research and/or those that struck me as just or unjust. While part of the analysis was informed by theory, a significant part was driven by the data. According to Schreier (2012) such procedure helps to capture some of the specifics of the data rather than forcing the data to fit the theoretical framework. After, I would look up the page number of those summarized situations, and go back to the original transcripts to analyse these stories in more depth. This way, I tried to reduce the data to a manageable amount, while I could still go back to more detail if I needed to do so. Then, I would check the categories with the research question and theory. I completed a few of these cycles before I arrived on the final main features of students' perceptions on justice and injustice. From those in-depth analyses, the five main categories as described in chapter 5.2 emerged.

Secondly, according to Mayring (2004) the analysis process reduces the quantity of data into a "manageable short text" that preserves the essence of the content (p. 268). Schreier (2012) further explains that QCA captures specific features of the data that are tailored to the research question, which reduces the amount of data in two ways. Firstly, it includes only the relevant parts of the data. Secondly, the consequence of creating higher levels of abstraction helps to reduce the amount of data as well. Indeed, the framework that emerged helps both to highlight the insights from the data, and can be understood as a tool to decide if and which fragments of the data are relevant to the coding framework.

The last feature of QCA includes the discussion on validity and reliability. Some researchers have argued for testing the reliability of the coding frame via a second coder in order to check to what extent this person produces similar findings (Holsti, 1969). Sometimes this is not possible due to practicalities. Additionally, researcher Schreier (2012) agrees with Mayring (2004) that validity may be regarded to be more important than reliability, the reason being that reliability is meaningless if the coding frame does not fit the context of the research questions and data. Rather Mayring (2004) and Schreier (2012) argue that the research question, theoretical framework, analysis and data used should be tailored into one another, which is cyclic in nature. This seems to imply an emphasis on validity rather than reliability. Despite the differences among researchers, it seems that researchers from both sides agree that the researcher must be transparent, systematic, and coherent in the way he or she uses QCA in his or her research, which I further explain in chapter 7.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the methodology chosen in this research is narrative in its approach. To find out more about students' stories on issues of justice in mainstream and Sudbury school contexts requires a research approach that reflects the subjective and symbolic nature of the stories. The experiences students in this research had is captured in the language they used. In other words, the linguistic narrations represent the experiences of these students in this research. As researcher, I connected with these representations via the interview transcripts. This is the material I as the researcher interpreted and analyzed in turn via critical incident analysis, and qualitative content analysis. The use of different analysis has been beneficial to highlight different aspects of the stories students tell about injustice in school that are relevant to the research questions.

5 | Research Findings

"If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together."
- Lila Watson

In the following chapters I will discuss how students' notion of justice informed their experience at school, and how their responses shaped the course of their life stories. Their openness and willingness to share their stories made it possible to explore them from different analytical angles. This study first introduces the life story of each participant, highlighting the critical incidents leading up to a significant turning point in which they dropped out from mainstream high school and re-continued their formal education at a Sudbury school. Chapter 5.2 will address the student's conception of justice in more detail.

5.1 Life Stories of Students

First, I will discuss how the significant turning points in the lives of the students of this research could function as indicator for the students' notion of justice. Smaller critical incidents in their lives accumulated over time and expressed themselves in a dramatic turning point in which each of these students dropped out of mainstream school. The four stories can be categorized in those who refused school and those who could not go to school even if they would have wanted it.[1] More specifically, the first two life stories, Rob's and Bram's, are about their struggle with being demotivated for school to the point they lost all interest in school and refused to continue. Differently, the last two stories describe Anna's and Luuk's lives, in which they were no longer capable of participating in school, regardless of interest or motivation. While Anna had to deal with her burn-out, Luuk's is about learning to live again after experienced suicidal tendencies.

5.1.1 Rob's Life Story

25-Year-old Rob recounted his earliest memory of school in which his primary teacher reprimanded him for cutting a different figure than she wanted. This seemingly in-

[1] This is not to say that Rob's and Bram's story do not have an element of 'I cannot do it' or that Anna's and Luuk's lack a sense of deciding to not do it. Rather, the title of the two sets of stories refer to the way they mainly experienced justices and injustices in school.

significant disapproval by the teacher reveals something about the conflict of interest between student and teacher. While Rob created a different figure, using the same tools, the teacher attempted to "correct" him by reprimanding him. However, Rob appears to disagree with both the teacher's wish, and the teacher's decision to penalize him for his behavior. *"That, in a way, set the tone for the rest of my school career,"* he said.

Such disagreement with adults about what subject material he should learn during his school career is a recurring theme in his life story. It defined his general attitude and strategy towards school.

> *"I just let it happen. I was quite conformed. I thought I couldn't change that. For example, if you consider skipping a school year, right, that was not really my choice. I felt indifferent about it. Either way, my parents and my teachers decided it. Thus, it happened. That was something I realized quickly: I don't have influence on it and so I just let it happen. Because I have never been someone who had a big mouth or would explicitly go against it. Subsequently, I would decide on my own plan."*

His reason to conform outwardly, while deciding to make different choices inward seems to reflect his wish to avoid conflict. He appeared to sense his lower position as minor. Although as a child he could not articulate it, his understanding is expressed in his actions.

As he became older, he developed an understanding of why his parents and teachers wanted him to skip a school year. He was a fast learner and often *"bored to death"* and they wanted to make sure he was challenged enough intellectually. His parents and teachers did not seem to take Rob's objections into account. He did not like being younger than his classmates.

> *"As a consequence, I've always been outside of the group: a year younger, and I was already not easy in terms of connecting with people, you know."*

Rob guessed that his attitude towards primary school as a child was along the lines of *"school is stupid." "I would sit out my time [at school]. And afterwards, [I] went to play outside, play games and doing things with friends."* Despite adults having the best intentions for him, Rob did not appreciate how they provided input in his learning.

Subsequently, they did not foresee that Rob being a year younger than his classmates would add to his difficulty in socializing in the first few years of high school.

> *"You are just a little smaller and a year younger right. You will be caught on everything that is a little bit different. So that was of course an easy one. At some point, we had a guy, two meters tall or something, a ridiculously tall guy. Probably a bit smaller, but oh well, I was very small back then, and then it quickly appears to be two meters. He thought it was hilarious to pick me up, put me outside and lock the door.*

Yeah, that type of stupid things."

He seems to perceive that anything that is different could be a reason for a classmate to bully him. Despite the bullying, he seems to have taken such situations coolly, as he sticked to his sense of control by making up his own plans that fitted his experience. He found his friend group, which he considered to be *nerds*. His hobbies during high school included *playing table tennis, playing games, and doing things with friends.* He plainly explains that he had no interest in working on school stuff outside school as he reserved that time for relaxation.

Maintaining his strategy of only working on school during school time became increasingly difficult for him. Having followed the preparatory track to enter university (VWO), various issues accumulated in the fifth and penultimate year of high school.[2] They sidetracked him from obtaining his high school diploma.

> *"Till 4-VWO [fourth grade of VWO] I achieved everything easily. In 4-VWO it all became more tough and in 5-VWO it flopped completely. My parents were getting divorced. I had some issues. And I was just not motivated, which resulted in redoing the year. And then, I said at some point 'well, I won't do it anymore.' And I actually quit. Started to skip classes."*

As he admitted, no one except himself believed his *"forged sickness letters."* To act outwardly defiant appears to contradict with his past strategy of conforming. His lowered motivation apparently reached a point in which he refused school demands and adult opinions.

> *"Of course, the attendance officer had an opinion about skipping classes as well. So, my parents were in the middle of a divorce at that time. And my mom thought I should really go to school. My dad was not involved in the process. And that is how I ended up at the [Sudbury] school."*

He caved under the pressure exerted on him. His mom found an alternative school and he agreed to visit it. On a snowy day, his mother drove him to a scouting building, which was the location of the Sudbury school. Impressed with the unusual school location, he thought *"wait, the way in which you can develop yourself can actually be different."* His first impression was confirmed during that day.

> *"Of course, they explained elaborately that 'You are not required to do anything. No one is going to tell you what you should do. And you are completely free to plan your own day.' So, my first response was like, 'Score, playing World of War Craft all day.'*

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[2]For more background information on the Dutch education system, see appendix A.

And it was genuinely my plan to do so till my eighteenth [birthday]. Well, I really maintained it for two weeks I believe. And then more interesting things started to happen."

He understood that this school could be an alternative that would please an attendance officer and his mother. Besides, it aligned with his own interests to do anything other than high school subjects. This appears to align with his former strategy: pleasing adults while making up his own plan. To his surprise, he noticed how his new setting was radically different from his previous high school.

"It was definitely 180 degrees different from what I thought. Because in my eyes, school was of course about sitting down, book open, and teacher. So, it was a challenge for me to let go of that concept in that regard. Additionally, the location was nice, and the environment had a different energy. It was much more quiet, approachable, and fun or homey, compared to a soldier-command type of environment. People were at ease. In [mainstream] schools, you can sometimes see how everyone freezes when a teacher approaches, and thinks: 'shit, are we doing everything right.' Well, that was definitely not the case here."

It is striking that he started to compare and contrast his experiences at his previous high school with the new set of experiences from the Sudbury school. In an attempt to make sense of his high school experience, he perceived a mainstream school to be an environment with a military command. He seems to describe an underlying fear experienced by students at mainstream high schools. The dissonance evoked by the image of students treated as soldiers appears to imply his disagreement with such treatments. This is supported by the fact that he liked the way he is treated at the Sudbury school. Further, it suggests that his sense of injustice lies in his belief that the restrictions on students' thoughts, voices, and actions were unreasonably strict.

Experiencing substantial liberty to move and be where he wanted still meant he would encounter the culture of the Sudbury school on a daily basis. He attributes these encounters to have sparked his curiosity, which he illustrated in his first encounter with the JC.

"I laughed out loud. I could not compose myself and I thought, 'What on earth is this again? Whoa, a bunch of kids who're playing judge.' I had to leave the room because I almost burst out laughing, no kidding. And then, I became very curious. Because they took it bloody serious, including [one of the founders]. He, from my first impression, was a grave, formal person, but of course, he's not. But they took it all so serious, which sparked my curiosity. I noticed that I was intrigued by 'What is that?' and 'What's in it?'"

Subsequently, such questions nourished his motivation to find answers. As he mentioned, he noticed a *"hunger to gain deeper knowledge"* and understanding. His chance to learn about what was behind the JC presented itself during the half-yearly JC coordinator elections which are held in the School Meeting. For the lack of someone else who wanted to take on this job, he and a 10-year old girl offered to do it and were elected. Liking his role, the usual six-month term became an eighteen-month endeavor. His explanation about his activities as JC coordinator illuminates something about his hands-on, practical, and analytical take on learning.

> *"On the one hand, [there were] the daily operations, and on the other, [we had] to make sure [the JC] matches the structure of the school. The latter is about making sure that the verdict fits the [school] philosophy and vision. The former is about the actual management of the Judicial committee. Thus, really following the procedures. We always work with the Robert's Rules of Order.*[3] *[The school] has a very formal setting, in which one taps, really, with a gavel on the table and says 'now, the meeting is opened.' And you all get your turn. And you cannot talk simultaneously. Oh well, a very formal order. To adopt this manner and utilize it as tool was a learning curve for me. Initially, it was a lot of laughing, shouting and yelling. But soon, I could see its added value. On the other hand, you got the almost philosophical discussions about 'All right, we've got rule x and another rule y, and how do these two relate to one another?' and 'When do you transgress the other?', and 'How do we think as a school, as people about it?' And in this, I experienced a lot of fun and challenge in [questions] such as 'What is there?' and 'How can it do better?' and 'How can it be sharper?'"*

His notion that he could understand the JC system's added value reveals something about how Rob's interest united with the school's interest. The Sudbury school's main interest is to continue its existence and serve the school community. Rob's needs appears to be exploring and learning interdependently, while having fun during the process of exploration. This seems to structure Rob's daily experience at the Sudbury school which sustained his motivation to take things on.

> *"Besides, I have worked as a small business owner from my eighteenth till one and a half years ago, including advisory work, fundraising, project management, etc. Last year, I went into a 9-to-5 job in recruitment."*

Counter-intuitively, his relationship with freedom throughout his story seems to indicate that freedom of thought, speech and actions are related to doing more rather than do-

[3]The Robert's Rules of Order originated from the US, which were published in 1876 (III et al., 2011). Further readings on this topic could include Robert's Rules of Order Online, 2013 and III et al., 2011.

ing less. This seems to be different from the belief that increasing the freedom of students leads to less activity. For him it was demotivating to do activities that he understood to be *"meaningless"* in relation to his immediate experience world. The liberty he received during his period at the Sudbury school allowed him to follow his curiosity, which brought him into the challenging situations he wanted to be in and required him to live up to his responsibilities. It seems that his experience as JC-coordinator had a snowball effect on taking on other responsibilities related to the Sudbury school. Even after he graduated from the Sudbury school, he acted as a EUDEC council member and co-founded another Sudbury school.

Reflecting on his overall experience in school he appears to take a more neutral attitude towards it.

> *"I wouldn't have been the person without that experience. And whether that's positive or negative, is in essence irrelevant. It 'is' in that sense. So, through these glasses at the time I thought it was useless, and afterwards I still think it was useless. But yes, it also got me where I am now."*

His reflection seems to place an emphasis on his development as person. As he seems to enjoy where he is now in life, he takes his past experiences for what they are. He appears to express his reserved attitude towards choosing one experience over the other in his advice to students in general.

> *"Dare to think about who you are, and what you want independently from the context of the education system in a sense. And dare to see that it may not fit you, it may fit you in a different way, or find out what you need in order to get through it if that is important to you. But try to not see it as something absolute. Ultimately, it is just a hoop. It is just a system as well, created by us, by people."*

Thus, in Rob's life story, his sense of justice and injustice appears to be located around whether he was forced to do activities that did not make sense to his experience of the world. He perceived both public primary and high school to be meaningless and demotivating, as a place he rather did not wanted to be. He appears to have felt reluctant towards the public schooling he had to attend. He experienced the opposite at the Sudbury school, where he was intrigued with the way it was operating. As he felt stimulated to act upon opportunities, he found a way in life, even after graduation. He seems to perceive these positive experiences to be more just, as he appears to relate the experience to the way the judicial system works in the school. His life story implies a recurring theme of managing his inner interests and outward adult expectations. Conforming to adult expectations outwardly outlined his immediate circumstances in which he tried to maintain a sense of autonomous decision-making. Maintaining this management of interests was

much easier for him at the Sudbury school, as his inner interest met the school's interest and in doing so sustained his motivation to continue taking action and doing inquiry.

5.1.2 Bram's Life Story

Bram, age 20, graduated from the Sudbury school not long ago. He has his eyes set on his next challenge: going to university.

> *"Yeah, initially difficult. I actually knew what I wanted to do but it's hard to go on and on because you are out of the system. Finally, however, I know that for example, I need math, physics, and English to go to university when I'm twenty-one".*

His remark indicates something about the challenges he experienced along the way. His understanding of attending a Sudbury school as "being out of the system" and going to mainstream school or university as "resuming inside of the system" seems to refer to the contrasting experiences he had. His past experiences about attending school include two primary schools, three high schools and higher vocational education in vocational education level 4 focused on engineering (MBO level 4).[4]

Starting his journey in a primary school in Luxembourg, he reflected on his experience there.

> *"I liked it there. It was much more relaxed there [compared to the Dutch primary school]. I had a lot of friends. There was more freedom in terms of going into the woods, doing activities, eating well at school and everything related to that. So it was very nice, but that was because you were a little younger as well. However, it actually started there already with underperforming, for example with the arithmetic."*

The fact that he mentioned he was underperforming back then suggests that he spent some time analyzing his past school experiences. Bram shared his understanding of his own underperformance in more detail, using his experience in the Dutch Steiner primary school.[5]

> *"Yeah, you start to get bored because it is chaotic and because I was quite quick with learning - swiftly with carrying out lessons and things. In chaotic, large classes in which other students have learning difficulties at the same time, you notice that you end up with things much faster than others. And yeah, you start to make use of it as well, right. Then, you start to tease, to annoy, and that can actually be a lot of fun, but it is actually not really the intention."*

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[4] See nomenclature for the definition of the term MBO level 4.

[5] A Steiner primary school follows the education philosophy of school reformer Rudolf Steiner.

His perspective on teasing behavior reveals that boredom was underlying his motivation to start and continue teasing. Adults may have easily misunderstood such behavior as 'boisterous' and as an indication that the child does not want to learn. Instead, the opposite appears to be true in this situation. Bram wanted to avoid boredom and do something interesting. In turn, he found this by engaging in annoying behavior, which is unfortunate from the perspective of the teacher who has to deal with it. From Bram's perspective, he did not experience the response from teachers that indicated his understanding of the situation.

> *"It felt as if you weren't being taken seriously. Because if you were, then they would have said 'Now over here, go do this' or 'do this' or 'here you got some challenge' or 'you are teasing now, go do this.'"*

In turn, Bram as a child appears to misinterpret the teachers' lack of action towards his behavior. In that moment, not being taken seriously may have translated to the idea that he could get away with his teasing behavior. In hindsight, he seems to be not happy with his behavior either back then.

> *"Ultimately, you become quite lazy from that, because you start to lose your own inquisitiveness. Thereby losing your capacity to explore and to do more and more and more. So yeah, you almost lose something I would say."*

As a result of this, his analysis on his own underperformance seems to involve the following dynamic. He became bored and tried to escape from that boredom by engaging in teasing behavior. In turn, he thought he became lazy, simply because he did not focus on doing more after his required work was finished. He seems to feel unhappy about this, as he talks about it in terms of loss. In other words, underlying his observable behavior that sought fun in the form of teasing people, there is an underused resource in terms of inquisitiveness and ambition that could have been tapped into as a motivation for doing more.

Over the years, his tendency to engage in the dynamics underlying his underperformance, seems to have become a habit for the way he interacted with school materials and teachers. As a result of this, it can be argued that this challenge identified by himself has been a critical incident which set him up for the interactions he experienced in the schools afterwards.

> *"You are about 12-13 [years] if you go to first grade [of high school]. You find yourself in that big class and doing things that you don't like. And you have teachers you don't like and those who actually can't handle these classes. Then you got chaos all at once. That's how I see it a little bit. It was all a new world. Learning is different there. And*

you try to test here as well, like 'how far can you go?' You know at some point from each teacher 'with that one you can go this far and with the other one that far.' And at first, you try to find these boundaries. At least I and a few others wanted to find them. And then, you try to go so far that the teacher gets angry with you and sends you away. Then, you have to copy stuff and got that type of tasks."

Indeed, he engaged in similar behavior as in primary school. A critical difference was the amount of learning material that needed to be mastered. In that sense, the attitude he developed towards school in primary school did not prepare him well.

"If you go to 1-VWO, it was such a gigantic transition from not really working for school to die-hard cramming - you have to do homework, you have to cram. Yeah, then you lag behind on the facts of 'How do you learn?' and 'How do I do my homework?' and 'How can I always do my best?' Thus, I think that has been the main reason why it all went so difficult in the beginning."

The difficulties he experienced in 1-VWO resulted having to do 1-VWO again. This foresight in having to repeat it in the same school lowered his motivation to the point that his parents decided to send him to a more expensive private school. His initial resentment against private schools disappeared quickly as he thought that the education he received was good in terms of *"more time, more customization, and better trained [teachers] who are motivating."* Subsequently, he started to feel more at ease there.

"Yes, I found my mentor there, a math teacher. Later, I found out that he was proclaimed to be the best teacher in the Netherlands, that kind of stuff. The way they did it was very different compared to other teachers [in the previous schools]. They tried to match it to how you learn, whereby you learn much faster automatically. They tried to do some extra work for you, so you got some extras at the subjects you excel at. And you notice that these people who're there every day, go to their work with joy. They aren't there because they have to work, because they have to make forty hours. Right, they are there because they really want to. And that's something everyone notices instantly."

These teachers in the private high school appeared to have understood what would make Bram tick, which seems to improve the teacher-student experience in class. On the one hand, Bram's eagerness and need to engage in challenge was met. On the other hand, because he was not bored, he had less reason to engage in behavior that is perceived annoying from the adult's perspective.

However, he had to leave after two years. He explains why his parents decided that he had to go to a public high school again.

"After two years, my parents kind of said 'It's good for now. It's just an expensive school. So you can continue on your own strength again.' Then, I actually wanted to go to 4-VWO, because I had done 2- and 3-HAVO/VWO. Technically in terms of grades, I was eligible to go to 4master's. But people didn't think it was a very good plan. At my former high school, they actually didn't want to accept me. Yes, that was quite painful, so to speak. Then, I wanted to go to the other school where a part of my friends went as well, and was rejected. So, then from the three big high schools in [my town], I went not even to 4master's but 4-HAVO to the other school. Yes, so it actually happened with much resentment. We actually knew in advance that it would not go completely well. So, that year, I didn't do much and then I ultimately came in contact with the mandatory school attendance, because I had too many hours of not-allowed absence."

In contrast with how he experienced his attitude towards learning at the private school, the rejection from the public high schools came as a painful surprise for him. It likely had lowered his motivation as he recognized that *"it would not go completely well"*. Additionally, it appears that the initial set-up of the school already indicated a misunderstanding of how Bram learned best: only allowing him in a 4-HAVO class, which is considered easier than 4master's, which was likely to bore him.

As he was disengaged with school, he started skipping classes as his way to cope with the situation at high school.

"No, Precisely because I knew that I didn't have to go to class if I didn't want to. It was more like 'Yes, I can do what I want. If I want to follow this class, I'll do that. And if I want that, I'll do that.' Yes, there may have been some underlying pressure like 'I have to do something. Doing nothing is actually not an option.' But that feeling of freedom, especially at that age, was like 'nice, I'll just do nice things. I'll see.' I did sports - hockey. Further, I had a nice group of friends. If you have that, you always have some support and place to go"

His disclosure on his understanding of skipping class offers an insight into how he engaged in making his own judgments and course of action within the limitations of his immediate circumstances. It seems that the same motivation of avoiding boredom and do something fun contributed to the way he made the decision to skip classes even if it meant he had to redo his year and came in touch with an attendance officer.

His last attempt to find his place in a public schooling institute was at an upper secondary vocational education institute (MBO) focused on engineering.

"So then I thought, I want to do something fun that fits me. But that wasn't neces-

sarily at my level. And it became an MBO. That was in a [bigger city]. And it was focused on engineering. In essence a very nice study - I actually started this with great motivation. But it soon became clear and I thought 'all right, these people don't suit me.' I couldn't have the conversations that I wanted, and the study material went too slow. So, slowly things started to get worse. Till I ended up with a mandatory attendance officer again."

Noticeably, the school environment was similar to his previous high school, in which his motivation was not sustained in the way his motivation had been shaped. Having quit his school attendance again, he was frank about it to his parents.

"I said, 'It is just not going to work.' And then, [my parents] already let my little brother attend a Sudbury school. He had been there a year already. And then my mother said, "Yes, I actually don't know it anymore. You've had already four schools. Go sit your time out there.' And that is what I did. After doing a trial week, I was accepted."

Clearly, he was done with the various mainstream schools. Ultimately, caving under the pressure that he had to do something, he went to the Sudbury school to sit out his last year. In the way he talks about it, he seems to frame school like a punishment, rather than an institution that is beneficial to him.

He started at the Sudbury school when he was seventeen years old. He recounted his first experiences there as a phase in which he had to develop a new understanding of what school entails and how it works for him.

"It's just not a normal school. I had to get used to it, especially because I had so many schools already and had gone through so many different ways of schooling. It was odd, because initially you come there for a week. And then, you think 'okay, when will I get my lessons here, when am I going to do that, when will someone come and tell me what I should do etc.' But that's completely not the case. So, it was a lot getting used to. Especially in the first months, for the fact that you are actually left alone."

His experience of *"being left alone"*, appeared to have contributed to rediscovering his innate drive to do and learn something.

"You game a little bit in freedom, then you do a some nice things, and at some point you start to have more contact with other people. That is all very nice, but at some point, you'll come to the realization of taking responsibility, like 'hey, if I want to do something, then I will really have to do it myself. I think that's a pretty difficult period. In every aspect you'll be confronted with yourself, your qualities, and how you work. But if you get that at some point and you start to get to know yourself a

little bit, you will notice that it gets better again. That you're going to look for the things you really want to do."

It is noteworthy that he started engaging in self-reflection once he was in a school environment, which he experienced to be socially engaging. His need to look inward seems to have manifested in connecting with others and doing things that were enjoyable to him.

An example of his self-reflection is his insight in why it makes sense to follow some rules. One of those rules at school is doing your cleaning tasks.

"It is actually satisfying to finish things, with small things as well, even if you don't like it. And that's the lesson I got from cleaning tasks. It might sound stupid, and it is as well, but the basics are all the same. Because if you don't do it, you are constantly stuck with it like 'yes, I actually did not do it.' And that is an unpleasant feeling."

This is striking, as Bram had a track record of breaking rules for fun in his previous schools. The need to have fun seems to be an important aspect in his decision whether or not he engaged in rule-breaking behavior.

"It is not fun to systematically misbehave. I think the difference lies [in the following]. Once you discovered something, then it is exciting. Then it is fun. And then, you will make use of that for example. However, as you start to notice 'okay, I get sanctions, the things I do are not appreciated' then it won't be fun in every way: not for yourself, not for others and not for the school. Yes, at some point the joke of it is actually over."

The ability of the Sudbury school to provide clear feedback on what is and what is not appreciated has been a necessary part of his learning.

"Once you look more inwardly, once you are searching, then you start to clash with yourself. And I could see directly a correlation with the fact that I got much more complaints: not doing my cleaning tasks, teasing people a little, etc."

As a result of this, it appears that the ability of community members to file complaints against him did not lead to resentment against community members. Instead, this quote reveals that he is candid about his understanding of his own shortcomings.

His inner reflection process seems to have contributed to the following observable behavior.

"I would say at the end of the first year, beginning of the second year. At some point, I became physical plant clerk. So I was responsible for the building, rent contract, mowing the lawn, cleaning the roof from leaves etc. At some point, I was in the ICT committee. I've tried to lower the internet cost via our internet provider. I've been

chair of the School Meeting. People said that I was the holy bean of the school, because I liked it. So I was allowed to lead the school meeting. I received some important letters as chair, which is quite a demanding role. Further, I have always been involved with the PR-committee, so looking at how to promote the school better, and actually everything involved with that."

It appears that he came to terms with himself, which happened in conversation with the school environment. It seems that his readiness to take on the next challenge and available opportunities to take on more responsibilities worked in tandem. From doing things he developed himself, and his development created a readiness to take on other opportunities.

Acting upon his insights in finishing activities, he decided to do a graduation project in which he wrote a thesis on the main question: *"How did I prepare myself to participate in society as an effective adult?"*

"At some point I heard that doing the thesis is a way to finish your school period here. My plan was to finish school after that year. For once, this would be a beautiful way to finish a school."

In writing the thesis, he did more than was necessary to finish the school. Doing a thesis project is another opportunity the school offers, rather than a mandatory element. It seems to reflect that his short period at this Sudbury school helped him to find and use his inquisitiveness. Rather than trying to be driven by what is required to be done, he found his drive in wanting to take on his self-selected challenges and bring them to a satisfying close.

As a final reflection on his school period, he would advise students the following:

"I think the most important is that it is actually okay to fail. What I noticed was that it does not matter what or how. It is okay to fail. Do just something you want, do something others do not agree with, do something odd. Do something you want to do badly or what you don't want. It doesn't matter, but you will continue to learn from it even if you fail. And ultimately, you'll emerge from it stronger. If you do something that does not go completely well, then you extract certain lessons from that. And the next time, something different again, you'll start much better. So yes, I think that can apply to everyone."

Thus, a recurrent theme in Bram's life story is a habit he built up in primary school. As the tasks in school were easy for him, he engaged in teasing behavior as a means of passing time. This way of interacting with teachers and school was not appreciated and appears to be misunderstood by most teachers. Bram's perception of justice and injustice appears

to be rooted in the way conflicts resulting from his behavior were handled. His stories indicated that teachers in primary school appear to ignore his teasing behavior, while teachers in high school would come up with punishments. Both of these responses were demotivating for him to do more than necessary, or to complete what had to be accomplished. This narrative is supported in the cases in which he had positive experiences. Teachers in the private high school and staff and other students from the Sudbury school either gave enough challenge and/or a clear feedback to his behavior that led to self-reflection. Therefore, his sense of injustice seems to stem from two things: the realization he was underperforming while teachers are supposed to help you learn do nothing, and the unjust treatment by teachers in cases of conflict.

5.1.3 Anna's Story

Anna recounted a memory from her primary school. This memory indicates that early on, she had difficulty in situations in which she experienced an overload of stimuli.

> *"Ooh well, if I was there at school, it was just fun. And then we did just nice things. But I am also quite sensitive and sometimes I took in much stimuli. So, sometimes it was a bit too much or something and then I preferred to stay at home for a day. And in rare instances, my mom would keep me at home for a day, of course, if it was really too much. But you know you cannot always stay home. So, then you go again, you know. And if you were there it was kind of nice but I've definitely felt some irritation, and I thought 'Ooh, I really don't want to.'"*

It is striking how her mom, school, and herself reacted towards her initial response of resentment against school. Adults like her mom and school seemed to not have interpreted her 'no' as a serious signal that something was not working for her. In turn, she seems to have rationalized this adult concept of "even if you do not feel good about the activity, you should do it." This seems to imply that the good reason behind her overstimulation went unnoticed. Not recognizing and overriding the signals from her physical body in this way is a recurring theme in her life story.

In her understanding, "Steiner school" is different from other "conventional schools" in terms of pedagogy.[6]

> *"It is anthroposophical. For example, it is more learning multiplication tables by throwing over little sacks of sand, so you absorb it with your body as well. In the*

[6]Anna used the term conventional schools. This is different from what I consider mainstream schools in this research. In the way she uses the term conventional school emphasizes how her Steiner primary school was different from the pedagogy applied in other schools including but not limited to public schools, private schools, and religiously oriented schools.

morning there were always stories. I think another big difference between the Steiner school and conventional schools was periodical education. Periodic education covers one subject in the first two hours of the morning for three weeks. So, for example, [you would have] a section with history, and then zooming in on the Roman period, you know."

This pedagogy which emphasizes *"learning by doing"* seems to seek ways in which the child is more stimulated than pedagogy in mainstream schools that follow a different pedagogical tradition. Nevertheless, she told that she enjoyed this pedagogy, as she seems to associate it with doing creative things. *"Painting, playing with clay, and knitting"* were among Anna's favorites during handicraft workshops in Steiner primary school.

Other stimuli Anna seems to have dealt with at her primary school were her classmates of which some were extra energetic in nature.

"Well, the idea of a Steiner primary school was that you got one teacher for six years, so he/she could grow with you. However, with our class that was definitely not the case, because it was quite an intense class. Teachers couldn't handle our class. In the end, we had six teachers. The combination of those boys was just very noisy. Ultimately one teacher approached it very well because [this teacher] said to the boys 'you are going to run six rounds around the school now, and then come back.' Ultimately, that worked quite well. But they were just quite intense. Really not quiet. So, they were busy with seeking attention and being annoying throughout the whole day. And it continued for the whole day. I feel sorry for those teachers, but oh well."

The last two quotes provide us an insight in how her daily classes may have felt. It presents two factors that added to the stimuli in the school environment: the teaching method and her noisy class. As Anna was susceptible for overstimulation, she appears to have taken in much of those stimuli present in her class. It appears that she did not suffer from it in primary school, as she said she generally liked her primary school. In contrast, she experienced her time at Steiner high school negatively.

"High school was a bit an odd start for me. I had some nice friend of course. So, that may have been the nicest, friends. But I liked very little about high school. I was just totally overwhelmed and burned-out. And I prolonged the situation for such period I could finish lower high school, but quite often I would arrive home crying. I attended a Steiner primary school, which is already more focused on doing things so to say. But I am someone who gets energized from doing and understanding things etc. It was kind of confusing to arrive at school every day at 9am, to learn something from a book that I'm actually not interested in and to follow different classes that when so fast that they ended before you even noticed. And I find it hard to define what it was

precisely that didn't go well for me. But it felt as too much pressure or something."

Clearly, Steiner high school contributed to her experience in which she used more energy than she gained from the activities she did. This implies that it is not only about the amount of stimuli, but also about whether or not she felt energized by the stimuli. Additionally, it seems that in her primary school years, she developed a habit of overriding her body signaling of what was too much stimuli her physical system could handle.

Instead of lowering the pressure on herself, she increased the pressure by shifting from HAVO to the VWO track, which is the preparatory track for university.

> *"Yes, I started at HAVO and my sister did VWO. At some point, half-way the first year in high school, I received an offer from school to enter VWO because my grades went so well. Because I felt I had something to prove or so, you know, I did it. My sister was accepted by my father and I was not. So I thought 'Oh if I do that, I will be more like [my sister] and then I move towards that direction.' And ultimately, I think I would have fitted HAVO better, and would've been better if I had stayed there. But, yeah, In VWO my grades were fine, but I was absolutely not happy. It was just a little bit less working with your hands, so to say."*

Different conflicting needs of hers affected her decision. She explains that her *"family places importance in obtaining the highest possible [in education], and hence had the feeling like 'oh, then I have to do VWO.'"* Hence, she associated her sister's acceptation by her father with her school achievements. In her mind, this appears to have translated into the idea that doing VWO like her sister did would be the best strategy to receive her father's affection. On the other hand, she felt *"absolutely"* unhappy at VWO. In her circumstances, this was not interpreted as an obvious reason to change the course of her formal education, as her grades were fine. If it were the case, Anna would have remembered a different response from her school and/or parents.

Further, she identified her home situation as part of the high pressure she felt. Not only in terms of placing a high value on school, but in everyday life situations as well.

> *"It was very tense [at home]. Yes, my father got a burn-out during that time as well and was at home while he always worked before. I've never had a good relationship with my father. But now he had a burn-out, he was always home. Of course, I was at school the whole day, but when I came home the atmosphere was never really relaxed, so to say. It was quite an odd situation at home. It was so a-relaxed that I was more tuned into that. I just could not relax anywhere. I could not relax at home. I could not relax at school. So, I think I was more focused on a kind of surviving, so to say, just following classes or something."*

As she *"was more tuned into"* her stressful home situation, her need to rest was not met.

> *"You think 'I continue and everyone finds it hard and difficult etc,' and at some point you just cannot do it anymore. It was quite forceful. I just fainted in the morning and fell against the wall and stuff. So, it really could not continue."*

The theme of not recognizing the risk of not providing yourself moments to release stress becomes more evident here. From a researcher's perspective, it may be argued that her interpretation of her own well-being seems to rationalize her parent's and school's view on how her school trajectory should be. This seems to relate to her trust in school and that her parents knew what was best for her. Apparently, they did not, as they did not seem to trust Anna's report of her own experience. They needed another adult's opinion, that from the doctor, to confirm that Anna *"had a burn-out"* and for that reason was not doing well.

> *"Only after receiving the message from the doctor, and having forwarded it to the school, we received some respect [for my situation]. Because then it became serious. And before, [the school] said, 'but she can just do it, and she's more intelligent.' So, ultimately, after the evidence from the doctor it was a kind of okay."*

It is striking that the whole situation seems to signal a distrust in Anna's report of her own experience. They did not seem to have recognized the severity of her case, nor listened to what Anna told them about her situation in a way that would change her school circumstances. This is odd, as we may agree that the one who is going through the experience, has the most detailed experience about one's own situation. Instead, the school only accepted her situation with the doctor's authorization, which seems to signal that they trusted or valued another adult's opinion about her experience more than her report on her own experience.

Even after the doctor's message, her family had come to terms with the fact that she had to quit school on her fifteenth because of a burn-out.

> *"Well, nobody supported it that I quit school. No one. Part of my family is very much about obtaining the highest possible. Hence, I had the feeling that I 'had to do VWO' you know. They didn't support me quitting high school. And school didn't support it either. So it was my mom, really, who said 'no, this is really what she needs.' So, without my mom it wouldn't have been possible that I would do something different. And that year, my mom really put effort in finding an alternative solution, rather than reentering the mainstream system. In this way she really fought for an alternative solution. Now [one aunt who was fiercely against my decision] sees that it is going better with me, now I do something differently, she has come to terms with it."*

It seems that her family, except her mother, seems to echo the school's point of view. Their understanding of what a fifteen-year-old teenager should be doing and feeling, did not match Anna's own social reality. Instead of listening to Anna, they seem to listen better to her mom. Anna herself had to come to terms with her own social reality as well.

> *"So, the doctor was definitely right, but it is crazy to admit it like 'O right, it really doesn't fit me.' Because the mainstream system just says you should be able to follow it if you just have normal intelligence. At least it felt like that for me. So it was a shock to not do that all of a sudden."*

It implies that she wanted to continue, but her situation could not. Additionally, this indicates that she seems to have bought into the society's point of view about how school should work for her. Although she did not state it explicitly, there seems to be an injustice involved in this situation in which she seems to have believed that the school knows what is best for her, while the school did not and still forced their mold of what a student should do onto her situation.

During her year home, she explained she *"rested in bed"*, following therapy to help her filter the overwhelming amount of stimuli to a manageable amount.

> *"It was actually a kind of center. And that center was specialized in teenager therapy, so to say. There, I first did some IQ tests, to see whether I was in the right place for what I did. And it really turned out that I let in too many stimuli. Then, I received many exercises for that. It was mainly about how you can place yourself a bit more outside [of a situation]. So, they did that with me in a sort of conversation format. And then, like you have to learn it at some point that you should not take it personally if someone you do not know says 'you are stupid,' you know. Yeah, you have to learn that as child. And that is how I had to learn that not everything had to do with me, so to say. I just do not need to pay attention to everything. So, I do not need to pay attention to someone who sits in front of me in the train. And that is, of course, easier said than done, because you don't know you're letting that person in. But these are things you have to learn in a certain way, yes."*

She had to learn from another adult what her problem was and how to handle that. In this case, it worked well for her. Gradually, her energy came back, allowing her to *"spend some time on meditative practices such as designing and decorating her room, and painting her walls."* She wanted to start somewhere with studying. Subsequently, she ended up at the Sudbury school.

> *"I had been home for almost a year. And at some point, I just wanted to do something. I wanted to continue. You have to get into it at some point. And I didn't want to*

never study again. At the end of that period I was like 'okay, I can just stand, and stand up without fainting.' And that was all very pleasant. But then, you know, you have to go to school and then I thought 'ooh it is going to be too forceful.' So, we started searching and a friend of my mother knew about the [Sudbury] School. And this [Sudbury] school is, so to say, a good way to resume in the system and be somewhere without a lot of must-do's. So, that was a good solution for that period."

Her motivation to continue studying and do something indicates her resilience to her situation. Given her situation, she seems to do the best she can, which is a recurring tendency in her story.

"I had to get used to new situations and stuff and then finding my own place. And once I found my place, I think after three months, I started to do more. Then, I started to bake, clean up, and really picking up things."

It seems that the environment of the Sudbury school allowed her to do the things that felt good to her in the moment. She elaborated further on her sense of safety in school, which illuminates something about the school's philosophy.

"I think because I could sit quietly there, and no one would say something about it. It was not wrong that I did something. So, the fact that no one said, 'oh you are not allowed to do that' or 'you have to do that now' you know. As a result, I thought, 'it is relatively quiet here.'"

Noticeably, she felt safer in the absence of a form of adult supervision of whose job it is to manage student behavior in this school, in contrast to mainstream schools where it is the job of adults. Additionally, it seems that her observation of less "not-allowed cases" implies that she experienced more of them in her former high-school setting and at home. In other words, it seems that her range of movement was more restricted in her previous high school and at home.

Anna attended the Sudbury school for one year. In that year she learned more about making decisions independently.

"Definitely, at the [Sudbury] school I received the opportunity to think about what I really liked and not about 'what would be a logical choice based on my background?' So, that was definitely one thing that was very valuable. And what I really learned is that I can count on trusting myself, which they advocate vocally like 'you have to really agree with your own choice and have your own reasoning behind it.' So, not because it is said to you, but because you stand behind it. And I think that is a wise lesson for my whole life."

Her observation that she could trust more on her own judgment, highlights her former

habit of relying on adult opinions that claim to know what is best for her. Once her situation allowed it, she continued picking up a study. She started studying graphic design.

> *"I do yoga. I find it important to live a little healthy and, besides, I do my internship at an advertisement bureau. And thereafter, I hope to just graduate [from my MBO study in graphic design]"*

Anna's advice to students is related to her realization that you have to be vocal about what you need.

> *"I think the most difficult period was just before I got diagnosed with a burn-out. If people have issues with that, I would advise to seek support timely. Because I was quite stubborn 'Oh I can do it.' And that doesn't work to your advantage. So, yes, seek support in time. And a lot of people will say 'ooh no, but everyone can do it.' There were few people who really understood, so there will be a lot of people who tell you to just continue and continue. But you have to stand up for yourself that you cannot pull it off anymore. On this aspect you have to stand up for yourself."*

Thus, Anna's experiences of justice and injustice seem to be less obvious, as she agreed with school and her parents that school is important and following mainstream education is a sensible thing to do. Clearly, however, the course of action violated her physical body as she fainted because of the chronic stress that was wearing down on her. It appears that she picked up the habit of not recognizing her own limits in primary school. Even if she did not feel good, probably not knowing that it was because she was overwhelmed with stimuli, she agreed with her parents and school that she had to go. From a researcher's perspective, it could be argued that there is an injustice involved in the fact that she suffered in her school's system that is supposed to develop the student in positive ways. The fact that it was not picked up sufficiently by the school appears to rely on their faulty justification that adults can have the full authority over the student, as adults seem to know better what is good for the student than the student herself.

5.1.4 Luuk's Story

With his sense of humor, Luuk, an 18 year old student, illustrated his overall school experience the following way.

> *" [It is now] 'The more souls, the more joy.' In the past, I always made that little joke, 'the less souls, the more joy' because I was autistic and an introvert. But the opposite is the case now, which I find nice, you know. Now, I like [to be around] a lot of people, the friendliness."*

His dramatic shift in perspective is remarkable. It seems that throughout his time in schools he learned to enjoy the connection with other people. He started off his story with his experience in primary school.

> *"Well, since the beginning I had some problems with school. In primary school, I just could not learn. I think only at a later stage, I was diagnosed with high intelligence. But I was called an unmanageable case. Then, my mom was like 'well, if they say it that bluntly, then I won't talk to that school anymore.' For a very short time they tried to give me some special support, but that didn't go anywhere. Then I was observed by a psychiatrist who attended the class and told us as an excuse: 'I will come to look at you all.' Meanwhile, the psychiatrist just looked at me. Very funny, I still have those reports. And then, I was diagnosed with autism, more specifically, with Asperger. After that, I went to a special school for autistic [children]. That went quite well, but of course, it was not all sunshine and rainbows, but it was much better. And they have helped me really well."*

The conflict he and his mom experienced with the mainstream primary school seems to have escalated. At its peak, his mom interpreted the school's terms of 'unmanageable case' as critique. Instead of listening to the words said, it is possible to listen to the needs underlying them. Clearly, the school was frustrated that they could not achieve the desired result with the way they work with their pupils. Luuk's mother seems to be frustrated that they were not adjusting the education sufficiently to fit Luuk's need. In other words, there seems to be a clash between the school's concept of how students should respond to their teaching practices, and the reality that Luuk did not fit into this mold. The transition to the special primary school was a positive shift for Luuk.

> *"I think there were about fifteen to twenty-five students per class. Then, you have one head teacher and one backup teacher. Everyone got their own place, you know, it was a primary school of course. On Friday you were allowed to take things from home etc. - all nice things. It also helped that my favorite teacher ever was there. If I was doing something annoying, the only thing he needed to do was to grab me and tell me 'Yo, Luuk, stop,' because I just respected him so much. He was always so kind. If someone who is so kind all of a sudden becomes angry with you, then you actually are quite out of balance like 'okay, okay sorry.' So much flexibility was created. [For example], I just lacked a lot of sleep. Because in our class they had a little corner with a beanbag and lots of Donald Duck comics, I sat there and sometimes I fell asleep, often just for 20 minutes. And instead of [shouting] 'Luuk, wake up!' the teacher would leave a note saying 'we went to gym. If you wake up, will you join?' It was personally customized."*

Luuk appreciated the customized approach the special primary school had towards his and his peers' learning needs. As his teacher seemed to understand what it means to act from the ethics of care, Luuk seems to listen better to the teacher's feedback on his behavior. This is further supported by his reflection on the bad memories he associated with his special primary school.

> *"I just can't think of many bad things there. And that is funny, because I often only remember bad things. The psychiatric institution was an exception. That was really hell on earth. But with regard to the special primary school, I can hardly think of one. I have a couple of bad memories, but that was because I raised two middle fingers to the strongest boy in the class. So, that was a kind of my fault, you see."*

His habit to admit his mistakes during his reflections on past events, indicates that he takes time making sense out of his experiences and processing his negative memories.

> *"At the end of eighth grade, I went to a psychiatric institution, where you received some support. That was the idea. You were picked up [in the afternoon], and then around 1.30 PM you were there for an hour. It was actually a kind of living room. You were just together. They tried to teach you things, like being social or whatever. Apologies for my language, but there I was fucking bullied. I was really held against walls, kicked, whatever. I literally hid in closets, because I was that scared. It was not normal. There were always fights, always this, always that. It was beyond bad. And always the mentors' response was 'push it' you know, and I found it so horrible, I got my own small room and was then picked up by my mother, because it became so incredibly dangerous. That was not a really nice period."*

His use of strong language during his description of his experience can be understood as his way of underscoring how much he suffered there. It took him a *"few conversations with a psychiatrist in order to get rid of his post-traumatic stress syndrome [PTSD]."* Because of his treatment at the psychiatric institution during school time, he missed half of the curriculum in eighth grade, and had to redo that year. That year took an unfortunate turn.

> *"[The school] thought 'we put all special children, all extra children, in one class.' That was a bomb. These were really people that could not go together. And that school has admitted that 'this was the worst idea we've ever had' as well. Really, every day, there were kids who were smashed to the ground by teachers, because those kids did something aggressive. The special primary school was really a good school. Only that idea was just not good. All those kids just need a little more attention in the sense of 'a little more supervision.' I really was one of the few who needed more attention in terms of learning support and quietness."*

His understanding for the school's short comings, seems to stem from the school's attitude towards him. Even though the class he happened to be in was too noisy for Luuk, the school was willing to find alternative solutions.

> *"A few times, I was almost squeezed between tables, because of the wrestling that took place. It was not normal. It was not such a great time, to put it that way. After [that incident], I quit very temporarily. Then, I worked with a screen [from home]. They had a screen in the classroom, with a camera on top of it. And then, I could make my tests and attend class in that way from my home. Because, in the end, I really was like 'It just becomes too much for me.' You know, albeit special primary school had its mistakes, they did their best even though it didn't work out well."*

As he could attend school from home, the school attempted to meet his clearly expressed need for *"learning support and quietness."* It seemed that his positive association with primary school was one of the reasons why he chose to attend the special high school located next to the special primary school. He initially enjoyed *"the primary school vibes, in which you had your own coat hook and spot in class."* Unlike primary school, he did not experience the same thing in high school, in terms of adequate support and understanding. Several incidents highlight the friction between Luuk and his peers, and the school.

At times when he was bullied, he got angry with those who bullied him and the teachers. To illustrate the dynamics, he explained about a typical situation on the playground.

> *"Two other peers were always bullying me as well. They knew I liked being alone, and then I was really standing alone in a corner of the playground where nobody was. Still, they would act annoyingly, [which was] not in terms of standing close to me - I don't mind that. But they said hurtful things, which they said intentionally in order to provoke me. I could become aggressive, but never physically, because I was and still am on my eighteenth, not looking like eighteen but like a scrawny boy. Then I could get angry and walk away."*

He appears to connect such situations of bullying with injustice. He recognized the situation to be intentionally hurtful.

> *"Then I was chased by teachers, while I just politely, went inside and sat down in a class or a quiet room for a while. I hadn't run away or something, even though I did that a few times as well. And then, they would come after me, and of course I would be severely reprimanded for leaving. But I thought 'I was the one who let the situation de-escalate,' you know. I mean, I see that I'm bullied, I feel I'm getting aggressive, I walk away because I can't stand it anymore, and now I got blamed because I walked away."*

In this situation he applied the one lesson he took away from the psychiatric institute. There, they seem to have taught him that *"retreating in the face of an anger outburst can be a better option sometimes."* However, in Luuk's experience, the teachers did not recognize or appreciate what he was trying to do. Instead, they punished him in the form of a reprimand. Luuk's sense of injustice seems to lie in the teacher's response to the situation in which they appear to respond in a threatening rather than protective manner.

Similarly, Luuk perceived the teachers behavior toward his depressive moods to be unsympathetic as well.

> *"If I really felt a depression coming up, I could just take myself out, if I could just be left alone. Ultimately, I would realize 'hey, it is not that bad.' I kind of understand it a little bit, all right. I mean, they [the teachers] deal with a child who claims to be suicidal, so you can't leave him alone in a room with scissors for a while, or whatever. But I actually get more stressed if I'm constantly chased by teachers and directors and who else. I would only get angrier. And my mother and I had told them so many times, but ultimately, again and again they wouldn't listen, you know. So, I would be like a flame over which they would throw a bit more gasoline."*

Even though Luuk and his mom appear to have clearly told the school what Luuk needs in order to overcome his anger attacks and depressive moods, the school seems to ignore their request.

> *"He bullied me incredibly with that. And yeah, I could not say anything about that, because, you know, schools with bullying, they don't do [anything about] that. They do something about 'bullying is bad' for one semester and then they pretend 'guys, bullying does not exist anymore.' I have always found that a bit strange. It was like they did the bare minimum to prevent bullying."*

Whether or not the school took bullying serious may be less of a question here. Rather, Luuk's remark seems to indicate that he felt unprotected and unsafe because of the bullying he experienced. The school's decision or inability to not work on their response towards Luuk seems not only ineffective, but also increasingly harmful as Luuk's frustrations did not seem to resolve themselves after an incident occurred. Nevertheless, he has had some safe havens which appear to make life worth living. This included his parents' support, especially his mom, his weekends at his grandparents which were quiet and relaxed, and his play time at an institute that focused on emotional support while playing outside and with border collies. Despite the moments in which he could release tension, the structural bullying, anger attacks, and conflict with teachers appeared to become too much for him. He became suicidal.

"Physically, I just climbed out the window. It was a sort of [rooftop] thing. But in my mind it was really like 'I don't see a way out.' Just genuinely, it went so badly at school, because I was bullied so much, and I couldn't concentrate, that I really thought 'how am I supposed to go on in my life?' My parents were going crazy, everyone was going mad, so I thought 'you know, I will end it now.' But for one reason or another, luckily I never went through with it. That's how I ended up on the roof. I really thought 'yeah, fuck it.' I have cut myself a lot, that kind of stuff. I really think like 'yes, that was a shit period, but that is just over and now everything is well."

This incident marked an *"all time low in his life."* This dramatic event indicates the contrast between how his current situation wore down on him too heavily, while he longed for a situation in which the people around him were happy with him. At that time, he only did not see how that was going to happen which seemed to have despaired him.

"The special high school said, 'Sorry, but we can't handle this.' 'Toedeledoki, [bye], we had no intention of staying,' [I said]. So, I was not allowed to come there anymore. And then I came here, [at the Sudbury school.] Ultimately, my mom forced me to just go there [for a visit.] So I went, and I was completely enthusiastic."

As Luuk mentioned the upside of the situation as well, the school's unsympathetic response meant that Luuk could and had to look for alternatives. His mom played an important role in finding the Sudbury school, and got him to visit it. During the visit the students at this alternative school explained him how the school worked.

"That was the moment I exploded from enthusiasm. My extreme sense for justice was complete happy here as students are responsible for the fate of other students. I still have a strong sense for justice, which is of course completely satisfied, because everything goes so incredibly fair here."

This underscores the prominence of justice in his narrative. The sense that he was responsible for ensuring justice as well seemed to have an empowering effect on him. In cases he would perceive the treatment from a student or staff/teacher as unjust, he could file a complaint (bring up someone) in order to deal with the situation.[7] Such practical and formalized options appeared to have been absent in his experience at the special high school. Being a school member of the Sudbury school meant that other students could file a complaint against him as well.

"For a long time, I have been in a system which really just suppressed me, bullied me,

[7]The term to bring up someone can be understood as to file a complaint against someone. It was developed at the Sudbury Valley School which had the JC office on the second floor. There, students could hand in a complaint form (D. Greenberg and et. al., 2003).

and whatever, which took me really a year to rewire completely. So yeah, most complaints were about that: just aggressive, suicidal, which they [the school community] did not welcome. And then, ultimately, you know, it disappeared via persistently bringing it up [file complaints], and just continually processing it [in JC]. And eventually, after a year or so I realized 'oh, you know, I am just welcome here.' You know, whatever I do here, they will handle it, as long as I won't endanger the school completely. After the begin period, it was just about learning how incredibly welcome you were. About this begin phase, I do not remember that much about. Ultimately it fades. Yes, because I actually was a little done with that, being brought up constantly, I started to change my behavior. [It] helped me to take a little bit of responsibility for my own actions rather than not doing that."

This indicates that the JC played a major role in Luuk's process to recover from his previous negative experiences. Noticeably, the feedback Luuk received from his interactions with the JC gradually started to be interpreted as safe, supportive, learning oriented and welcome. As a result, he started to enjoy the things he did for himself and in relation with others.

"[I did] lots of talking, just doing a lot of fun things. Playing games, that kind of thing, uhm, lots of League of Legends, which was super trendy back then. But everyone who played League of Legends left school, so we do not play that anymore. In the last two years, for half a year, I just really started to learn more about programming. So just the first year, it was learning to get used to [the working of the Sudbury school]. The second year, it was very vibrant. And the third and fourth year it was more focused on doing fun stuff while learning and finding an internship, these kind of things."

In this environment he seemed to feel safe and started to engage in activities that are 'just fun.' Over time, he started to do other activities as well, including 'studying' subjects adults would consider study. It seems to imply that his motivation to do and learn things came from within. His life story could be understood as a learning trajectory for him.

"Oh well, it was real, my whole story had bottomed out, but in the end, I am just very happy. I can talk about it so well and I wanted to talk about it because it is all over. It happened, I learned, and now my life is going well."

He appears to have given his experience a place in his understanding that has allowed him to move on. His appreciation for the way the Sudbury school worked for him is visible in the comment he would tell to students.

"well, quite little advice, you know. It is not as if I have fought and overcame in the

end. No, I just was lucky that I had this [Sudbury] school. And everything went better because of that, you know. Of course, you know in this school that I overcame these tantrums, I could not have done that at a mainstream school."

To conclude, being diagnosed with Asperger has been a defining feature during his primary and high school period. His diagnosis seems to have been an important factor for placing him in special education. His sense of justice and injustice seems to be associated with his sense of safety and being taken care of. While he seems to associate his special primary school and Sudbury school with being treated justly and with care, the opposite is the case during his time in the psychiatric institution and special high school. These institutions seem to engage in failed strategies to meet his needs for safety and respect for the way he functions as person. Thus, Luuk's sense of well-being appears to be closely related to his understanding of justice and injustice.

5.1.5 Concluding remarks

In this section I answered and discussed the sub question: "How did students' notion of justice inform significant turning points in their lives?" The four stories reveal much about how these students did not "fit" mainstream school, including public, Steiner, and special schools. In their experience, this inflicted suffering because of the conflict between adult opinion about students and student's opinion based on their own social reality. In return, these students developed their own coping mechanism to deal with particular adult conceptions of how a student should learn, behave, and think. While Rob refused the idea that school was relevant to him, Bram felt unfairly treated when local public high schools refused to enroll him. Subsequently, both their motivation dropped to unsustainable levels. In Anna's situation, the overall adult opinion was that she was intelligent enough to do VWO and hence should do that. However, her body and everyday life experience sent the opposite signals. Constantly overriding her own physical system, resulted in a burn out. Luuk's need for safety and social acceptation were constantly violated in terms of unjust treatment by teachers, and bully behavior from peers. Reaching a point of desperation, he almost committed suicide. The incident resulted in school expulsion. In other words, the negative feelings these students experienced indicated that a need of theirs was not fulfilled. This can be an indication for the injustice involved, as adult's claim to authority to manage student behavior is based on the faulty assumption that they know better than the student what is best for them.

The stories reveal that they associated justice with a system or teacher practice that would take their needs into account. For example, during his time at the primary school, Luuk understood his teachers' responses as caring and accommodating. Likewise, Bram's experience with his private school teachers was positive and less associated with justice

as these teachers accommodated his learning effectively. Such situations occur in mainstream schools as well. Nevertheless, that does not make the underlying claim to full authority over the student less just. Instead, the fact that students mention both teachers who are treating them justly and those who do not in a similar school system indicates that justice in mainstream schools appear teacher dependent, rather than systematically enforced. In contrast to the Sudbury schools, the four students of this research have had positive experience related to the way justice is enforced via the JC, which is a more systematic approach to justice.

5.2 Students' Conception of Justice

Their life stories as described in the previous section demonstrate that the participants of this study interacted with the justice system/practice that were already in place in their schools. These systems or practices are supposed to bring justice to the situations in question. As we have seen in their life stories, these students did not always agree with the way justice was brought to them. This entails that they evaluated the justice practices or system at school according to their own perception of justice and injustice. Five features emerged from understanding students' perceptions of justice as evaluations of a justice system/practice. These include (1) student's interest, (2) their ability to participate in situations involving justice, (3) their acceptance of authority, (4) their perception of procedural justice and (5) their perception of just outcomes.

5.2.1 Justice and Students' Interest

The life stories of students reveal their authentic ways of engaging with their surroundings, which shaped their focus of interest and disinterest. I understand this as their mental map, including facts about their social reality, values, and beliefs. Having their own ideas about what they want to do, to learn, and be treated, could clash with the opinion of adults on these matters. Perhaps, in disservice to students, adults often act as a dominant authority figure in the role as parents, teachers and school staff. In the experiences of Rob, Bram, Anna and Luuk, differing opinions with teachers and parents increases the chance for conflict involving questions about justice.

For example, Rob's discontent with all school subjects illustrates his opinion that subject content had to be relevant for him.

> *"[It] absolutely did not have any relevance for my world at that moment if I look at things such as math with learning tricks like 'Hé, you have to learn the ABC formula.' And I wanted to know why the ABC formula worked as it did. [The teacher would say,] 'just assume that it works like that.' And that was the case with chemistry, physics, and biology, and actually all exact subjects in which you were served such bite-ready pieces [of information]. And then, you just had to assume it to be the truth without thinking whether that was actually the case. And that took away all fun you know. I wanted to know why and not how because I find that not so interesting. That follows automatically. I had a good friend of mine, with whom I attended class. He was such a math virtuoso. Such jerk who would open his book for the first time one day before the test, and then passed it with a 9.5 [out of 10]. But he could always explain to me well why it was as it was, even though I definitely did not always understand it. Anyways, it did provide something to hold on in the region of why things work."*

(Rob)

In this example, the teacher decides on what is important for Rob even if he disagreed. This teacher did not seem to catch Rob's need for deep learning in order to feel stimulated, as his response is authority based rather than reason based. This reveals a relationship between sense-making activities and justice. From Rob's perspective, the teacher's justification for learning the ABC formula did not make sense.

Unlike Rob, Anna liked math in Steiner high school for exactly similar reasons why Rob disliked it. Her liking for math seems to be based on *"surviving"* her daily life as she coped with chronic tiredness.

> *"I did mathematics B [mathematics for scientific studies] which was at least a sort of clear for me. And that was like, you got a formula, and there was only one way to calculate it. If you are very tired and do not feel like thinking about things, then it is okay. No discussion about it. [That's why] I found it quite pleasant. I think that was the nicest subject at that that moment." (Anna)*

It is still consistent with the students' general reflection that subject matter must be interesting. What is understood to be interesting is subjective and varies among these students. Similarly, to Rob interest to understanding why, Bram appears to understand his interest in terms of usefulness.

> *"I had to do French, which I think is a terrible language. And then you really have to do it till three VWO. I have done it, but I cannot speak a word of French. So it is quite useless. It does not need to be fun, but there must be a reason for it." (Bram)*

Bram appears to emphasize usefulness as a criterion for the subjects that capture his interests. Further, Luuk seems to find this practical aspect involving learning important as well.

> *"Yes, what did it [special high school] teach me? Yes, I think geography and math, but not really social problems." (Luuk)*

He seems to have wished for learning about matters that had an immediate effect on him, such as social issues in is immediate situation. Likewise, Anna explains that she had other concerns at that moment that took away her attention from the classes given.

> *"Uhm, I think that I would have found the subjects interesting. But I was so tired and overwhelmed. I was busier with other things you know. I think I didn't pay attention to what was said, because the whole system became so irritating." (Anna)*

In spite of their slightly different emphasis on their understandings about the things that interested them, the dynamic appears to be similar. The teachers of these participants

decided what they had to learn, regardless of whether these students were interested in learning it.

Therefore, these students developed their own opinions and scope of understanding about the situations they encountered in school. As a result of this, students' interests shaped their focus and the way they experience situations in school. Subsequently, it informs whether a disagreement with potential conflict would emerge. As soon as it started to conflict with adult opinions about matters that affect them, it potentially became a justice issue for them.

5.2.2 Justice and the Ability to Participate

All four students in this research found it important to have the ability to influence decisions that affect them directly. They appear to relate justice and injustice to whether or not they were ignored about such issues. Having a keen sense of the types of limitations placed on their thoughts, speeches and actions at school, these students expressed their contentment and frustrations about those they perceived to not make sense.

Bram clearly explained what he found unjust about the inability to participate.

> *"Look, if a teacher tells me 'it must be like this.' And I say, 'well, you can better do it like that.' And he says, 'yes, maybe true, but I still do it like this.' That is fine, but I often experienced that he would say 'no, you have nothing to say about that.' You know, in that way. I become quite angry because of that. I think 'yeah, but you think that you are much more than me,' and that kind of stuff. Then, an argument always emerges quite quickly, [especially] as you're in your puberty. Ultimately, it ends with me being send away from class, [which shows off authority.] At least from me there was no input accepted. So, some teachers enjoy what they do, and then you notice that you can play with that. You are allowed to say something about it, and you can join the discussion, which is super nice. But I noticed that there are some teachers who do not sit there for their own joy, and then they just want to play boss because technically they are actually the boss. And I noticed they would misuse it once in a while." (Bram)*

In such situation, the teacher seems to understand it as a student management issue. For an unknown reason, the teacher seems to think that the denial of student input is the best way he could fulfill his needs during teaching class. Perhaps the teacher felt criticized by Bram's remark, failing to connect with the motivation behind Bram's words which is to learn by engagement. Bram may not have built a connection with the teacher in the first place, which would allow the teacher to frame Bram's comment as a supportive contribution. Nevertheless, the teacher is responsible for his response that attempts to

force Bram into submission. As the teacher fails to communicate the needs, feelings, and request underlying his commanding tone, Bram appears to have not been able to connect with that. Subsequently, he interpreted the teacher's response as command and demand. Agreeing with that command was not an option for Bram, as agreement is voluntary, and he already disagreed with the teacher. The two options he had left is either to submit or to rebel. Bram's choice to rebel was met with a punishment: being sent away. This seems to have not solved the situation for both the teacher and Bram, as Bram continued to rebel in the face of hearing demands from his teacher. And Bram's anger or unmet need continued to not be met in these situations. Thus, the teacher's punitive approach towards solving issues of justice is not only ineffective, but in this case harmful to the student as well.

Bram highlights that not all teachers engage in the dynamic of commands and rebellion. In situations where teachers allowed him to participate, his need for engagement and being listened to were met, putting the potential issue of injustice to rest. Noticeably, in his experience he had both teachers who he perceived to act justly and unjustly towards him. This further evinces the argument that his treatment of justice by teachers is teacher dependent.

Rob experienced a similar command from a teacher but chose the strategy of submission instead of rebellion.

> *"I remember the scenario that we were having lunch in the break and there was some trash next to the place I was eating. And then, a teacher passed, and told me 'Clean that up.' And I was like 'Why should I clean that up, that's definitely not mine.' And he said 'Yeah, but it is our school and we have to do it together.' From hindsight, I should've said 'In that case, clean it up yourself dick.' Anyways, I cleaned it up docilely. But that was the tendency, in terms of the teacher is the boss. And you do what he says or else." (Rob)*

Rob's strong language could be understood as his way of expressing his reluctance towards the teacher's demand to clean up trash that was not his. In spite of the fact the teacher came up with a reason, in that situation Rob still perceived it as an order. Interestingly, Rob's reflection on what he should have said, implies that he seems to be still dissatisfied about that experience, even though it happens many years back. It can be argued that this shows another form of how unresolved situations appear to continue in the participants' memory.

Bram and Rob illustrate their unwillingness to accept the manner in which these high school teachers made use of their authority. They would associate these situations with being treated unjustly. It appears that their need for freedom to decide what things they

would do that make sense was unmet. In another story, there were situations where the teacher acted as a judge when disagreement between students occurred. Luuk's experience with a cheating classmate illustrates this dynamic.

> *"[My classmate,] was always - I would not be surprised if he still does it - he was always copying, always cheating, to say it that way. That is why I was always [looking at him closely]. And that is not my task, you know. That is the task of the teacher. But the teacher did not do anything. As a result of that, my feeling of justice was really burning so badly, that every time I was like 'come on.' Because the teacher didn't do anything, I was like, 'I have to say something about it.' And if I said something about it, I would get reprimanded, and he would get more freedom. And [my classmate] knew that I could not stand it. This is how he was incredibly pestering me."*

Luuk's experience of injustice seems to involve a more complex dynamic. In this case, his disagreed with the way the teacher did not respond to prevent cheating. He had the option to ignore (submit) or say something about it (rebel). As he associated the cheating as a disturbing unfairness, he decided to address it. The teacher reprimands him, which can be understood as a form of punishment. In such situations both teacher and student suffer under the circumstance, as the punishment is ineffective to prevent such dynamic from happening, nor did it meet Luuk's need, which may have involved order in terms of clarity of rules. The teacher, who has the formal authority in this case, failed to act upon the dynamic between students as well. The situation in which Luuk perceives his classmate to enjoy cheating with the knowledge that Luuk could not stand that involves an injustice as well.

In contrast to the Sudbury school, Bram experienced more justice there as he had the opportunity to participate.

> *"At the Sudbury school it is like 'okay, there are rules, and you break a rule here which you should not do.' But they would never ask you why you did it. That is something you should decide for yourself. Hence, it becomes impersonal. And once you make it impersonal, there will never be a personal clash with other persons. And because the Sudbury school is operated by students, then you get the feeling of participation. In fact, there are more students than staff members. And if you understand that you can participate, you automatically start to take your responsibility. If you think 'this is incorrect,' or 'there is a loophole in that rule' or 'it is ridiculous that we must do this,' or you name it, then it is like 'fine, fix it in a different way.' So that is a big difference between [other mainstream schools and this Sudbury school]." (Bram)*

He emphasizes the different options he and all students and staff at the Sudbury school have at their disposal if they cope with disagreement. In this way, dissatisfying issues,

requests for clarifications, or perceived problems can be resolved via a formal outlet. Bram, Luuk and Rob explicitly evaluate the school's system that deals with issues of justice as fair. This implies that they seem to associate justice with the opportunity to propose a better way to meet their needs in collaboration with the community.

Thus, these students provide insights in the relationship between participation and justice. Interestingly, the examples reveal that students have certain concepts about justice and fairness, and want them to be reinforced consistently. In Bram's case, his intention for participation was to improve learning. In Luuk's case, it was about the reinforcement of the official rule in his special high school which forbids cheating. The options for either submission or rebellion failed to enable them to enforce their conception of justice, or change things they found unjust, which underscores another situation of injustice. These include situations in which the authority figure, in these cases the teacher, is able to exercise power over them, in a way that is not supporting their understanding of justice. In cases where they were empowered to change something about their situation in terms of acceptation or initiating change, they understood it as more just. This could include situations in which the school's system formalized participation or by individual teachers who allowed more student participation.

5.2.3 Justice and the Acceptation of Authority

The stories of these students seem to imply that they refute the authority of a person if power is used over them. On the other hand, they seem to experience a sense of justice when they accept the authority figure. Hence, they appear to understand justice in relation to the acceptance of authority.

> *"I do not like it when people have power over me. It is a very nasty feeling for me if someone has a lot of power and uses it in a mean way. I would just go against it out of principle. That's just my personality. I cannot change much about that. I can give a good example: I attended a class in 4-HAVO. It was about the binary system of numbers. It is a very easy way to translate zeros and ones into numbers. And I already learned it during another subject [called] programming. Next to me there was another student who did not understand anything. Without saying a word, I showed him on paper like 'Hey, this is how it works.' Within half a minute, he was like 'Ooh' and understood it exactly. The teacher was standing in front of the class for fifteen minutes and no one understood anything. So, at some point he saw that I was busy with the other student and that I was scribbling something. Then, he got very angry with me like 'Yeaah, you must not do that, you must listen to me.' So, I said 'Yeah, but you just don't explain it well. There is a much better way.' Well, a discussion emerged. At some point, he became so utterly mad, [and said] 'Well, then you do it.'*

I said, 'sure, that's fine.' So, I took over the chalk and put it on the board. Within two minutes the whole class understood it. Yes, for me it was great fun, because in this way you can undermine the teacher a bit. A nasty word, [undermining], but yeah. And the teacher became so utterly mad at me that he sent the whole class home but let me stay. You know, that feeling of wanting to have power was so immensely strong in some teachers. Yeah, that just clashed with me." (Bram)

The teacher's response indicates his use of force to be listened to by Bram and his classmates, which is indicated by the teacher's emotional response and decision to punish. From Bram's perspective, there seems to be no option in which he could openly disagree with what the teacher told him without risking being punished. The teacher's moral game of punishment and rewards seems to fuel Bram's determination to be even more rebellious. The example illustrates how the teacher's shortcoming are the justification of his authority at school: being able to make sound and impartial judgments, has sufficient knowledge on how students assimilate knowledge, and has sufficient knowledge on how students' motivation work. These short comings are not to necessarily to blame on the teacher, as these short comings are human. The implication seems to be more that a teacher's ideal profile on which the teacher's authority is based is unrealistic. Perhaps, if the teacher would have understood that Bram was trying to help towards the common goal of learning the binary numbers, the teacher could have informed Bram to choose a better moment for him to do so. In this way, the disagreement may have de-escalated. This counterfactual illustrates that a variety of response other than the one the teacher chose were available to this teacher.

Likewise, if the student accepted a teacher's authority, the student appeared to be more agreeable with the way a teacher handles situations. For example, Anna's intellectual understanding of school appeared to be more align with the ideas her teachers had about school and learning. She reflected on how she did not dislike any teacher particularly.

"I was always a pretty obedient student. So, I think no teacher really had an irritation towards me. They always were nice. I was always just quiet in class. So, I think they were just happy that someone did what was asked from them." (Anna)

Anna grew up and agreed with the idea that school was important, and it appears that the teachers' instructions made sense to her as her aim was to learn it. As a result of this, she disliked teachers that paid too much attention to troublemakers.

"For example, there was a teacher who went against noisy people, who did not do what was asked of them. She was busy all the time with people who didn't really feel like paying attention. And then, I sometimes had the idea that I was sitting there for nothing. Well, if a class was 60 minutes, then we would listen for 40 minutes how she

tried to deal with those boys. I was really like, yeah, in that case I could have stayed away for 40 minutes as well, you know. So, in my opinion, I think that these teachers were the most annoying. I understand as well, of course, that you want to keep an eye on those boys. But I think I found those teachers the most annoying at the time." (Anna)

As a result of this, when the teacher's behavior was not aligned with her interest to learn, she would label it as an irritation. Interestingly, she shows some empathy for the teacher. Additionally, she did not make an explicit connection between her seemingly inability to say something about the teacher's behavior and justice. Nevertheless, I may argue that from a researcher's perspective, the injustice in this situation is located in the fact that Anna did not think she could affect her learning circumstance even if it did influence her learning negatively.

Similarly, Luuk's respect for his favorite teacher appears to relate to his understanding to be treated justly. As mentioned in his life story, one of his primary teachers only had to remind him of his behavior if he was being annoying.

"If I was doing something annoying, the only thing he needed to do was to grab and tell me 'Yo, Luuk, stop,' because I just respected him so much. He was always so kind. If someone who is so kind all of a sudden becomes angry with you, then you actually are quite out of balance like 'okay, okay sorry.'" (Luuk)

Luuk's sense that the teacher could address him the way he did, comes from Luuk's understanding that the teacher acts from the core intention to accommodate for his and his peers' specific needs. Further, in situations teachers neglected his needs, this reason of accepting a teacher's authority was violated. In such cases, he associates these situations with unjust treatment. The following quote includes a reference to his time at the special high school.

"For a long time, I have been in a system which really just suppressed me, bullied me, and whatever." (Luuk)

Anna's and Luuk's willingness to comply to their respective teacher(s) seem to imply the manner in which they evaluate justice matters. Their ideas about just treatment are more align to the way the teacher acts. Likewise, in Luuk's and Anna's case the opposite appears to be true in their experience as well. In cases they disagreed, they feel irritated or angry and associate it with unjust treatment.

This observation of legitimate authority is further highlighted by these students in their stories about their experience at the Sudbury school. Here, these students have a direct influence on the way they want to be treated. As Bram said before, *"[if] it is ridiculous that*

we must do this, then it is like 'fine, fix it in a different way.'" Rob added an example of how a small disagreement in school is dealt with.

> *"Where needed, you can submit a motion [in the school meeting] to try to modify, adopt or remove a rule. One rule we had a lot of discussion about was whether you could sit with your feet on the coffee table in the sitting area. Yes, that was one that came back every time. Definitely for new students, it was a fun learning curve. 'Are your feet sitting on the table?' [A new student would answer,] 'Yes.' 'In the rule it says that this is not allowed.' 'Yeah, but I think that it's allowed.' 'Well, all right, what are you going to do about it?' And then you had another motion [in the school meeting]. And then it is [a decision] in which the majority of votes counts: one vote more for or against. So, you always get a back and forth sliding case. Then you see that it [the rule] is very much alive. It is not that we came up with a set of rules ten years ago that we still apply strictly to this day." (Rob)*

In other words, students experienced more justice when they can negotiate the contents of the school's house rules, and thus the authority that is exercised in the Sudbury school. The set of rules adopted by the school meeting and enforced by the JC can be changed via the school meeting by students themselves. Hence, there is a formal avenue for students to get their sense of just treatment be reflected in the school rules. This implies that the contents of justice and the rules by which justice is brought about is a collective agreement. In other words, the abstract term of justice is embodied in the sum of individual views on justice and rooted in the context where justice is practiced and lived.

Thus, these students have developed their own understanding of what being treated justly looks like. The violation of their measurement stick for justice appears to be associated with unjust treatment, and in the cases of Rob and Bram with an explicit rejection of unjust or imposed authority. In the cases of Anna and Luuk they appear to show understanding towards a teacher's point of view in a situation involving injustice. The opposite seems to apply as well. If teachers or staff take the understanding of these students on just treatment into account, these students appear to associate it with justice. Hence, the acceptation of authority appears to be situated in their conceptual framework of what just behavior looks like. As students seem to find it more just that rules can change over time, it implies that justice can be understood as a collective agreement, rather than an abstract universal rule.

5.2.4 Procedural Justice and Impartiality

The students of this research, especially Bram, Luuk and Rob, expressed that they find impersonal treatment important in situations involving justice. They considered the situ-

ation to be more just if treatment was impersonal. The opposite seems to apply for these students as well. They would experience situations to be less just in cases were a treatment is personal or partial. Luuk experienced the Sudbury school as *"completely neutral" (Luuk)*, which captures the general experience these students had there.

To ensure a high level of impartiality in the Sudbury school, the school meeting and JC adopted certain processes. The students enthusiastically explained in detail how the JC worked. All participants discussed the basic elements of the JC process in similar ways.

> *"You have a chair who leads the JC. Three or four people have duty in the JC. Then you are just a member of it. Additionally, there is a sort of school law book [the Management Manual]. With regard to the complaint you must substantiate why this is or isn't according to the school rules. And your role as JC member is to vote in favor or against the complaint." (Anna)*

As the JC system requires multiple people to come to a verdict, it attempts to avoid judgments that are based on the perspective of one individual. Additionally, these people follow the rule book which is another way to minimize final outcomes that are made on partial grounds.

> *And then you start thinking about the sanction. With regard to sanctions, we often look at the situation. [Not] purely like 'He was disrespectful,' but 'He was disrespectful because the accuser etc.' Eased circumstances can be taken into account. We look at how often it has happened, and we use tiered sanction as well. The first time will be a warning, the second time, [the sanction is] often bounded to a situation or location as we say. So, if you broke a rule in the computer room, you are not allowed to enter [that room]. That is called exclusion. Situation bounded sanctions can be like 'O yes, you have used a glass from the kitchen corporation without permission. You are not allowed to use anything from the kitchen corporation for two weeks.'" (Luuk)*

Only in the phase where sanctions are decided, the JC looks at the circumstances to see what an effective sanction would look like in each case. Ultimately, students perceive such sanction to *"learn"* from the incident.

> *"An important part is that the JC is safe for everyone, which goes hand in hand with impartiality." (Bram)*

Thus, in the Sudbury school, these students seem to understand the JC's sanctions as a way to learn, rather than as punishment. Their sense of just treatment seems to be based on the clear rules, the system in which complaints are processed transparently, and the sense-making intention and reasons why the rules and systems work in the way they do.

While the JC enforces the rules, the school meeting is the place were rules can be changed

and decisions can be made. As Rob explains, the school meeting is governed by rules that should ensure impartiality and a collective sense of safety.

> *"You see that almost all important decisions are always taken unanimously, with one or two abstentions, or with one or two against. And that is because of the process in the School Meeting. We comply to the Robert's Rules of Order. This means that you have a chair who leads the meeting. Everyone together is responsible for the order in the meeting. So, together you make sure that everyone receives time to talk if one wants to. Via this process, you have a very safe atmosphere. For example, things like personal attacks or addressing [other] persons personally are not allowed. You talk to the chair. So, if I want to say something to you, then I say 'Ms. Chair, I would like to say to the lady there that ABCD.' In this way, you filter out the personal. So, then you can discuss very much about the facts and subject matter. Hereby, you obtain and safeguard a very high quality of discussion. Almost without exception, all arguments will be raised. And with all arguments raised you will see that typically really important decisions are taken unanimously. Of course, you have things like 'feet on the coffee table' for example. Yes, here the opinions are divided, but this is not critical for the continuation of the school, compared to deciding on the budget or [hiring] staff, the attendance policy, the excursion policy, or the cleaning schedule. These are all things that are discussed very thoroughly, and decisions are taken with a vast support." (Rob)*

In other words, the school meeting and the JC work in tandem. The power of the JC could be understood as exercising power with the school community and the individual. The individual can exercise direct influence over the contents of the school's house rules via the school meeting. Each of these processes are governed by rules to ensure optimal impartiality, which is recognized by students as fair and just. Subsequently, they accepted and appreciated the authority of the JC better as well.

Although Anna appears to be more reserved about her experience with the JC and School meeting, she recognizes that the system works as well.

> *"In my opinion it is just a huge puppet show but it works, you know. If it works in itself, then it is pleasant. But of course, ultimately hitting with a little gavel etc. is a sort of very funny." (Anna)*

This seems to stem from her opinion about which complaints are serious enough to be processed in the JC.

> *"Look you are not allowed to leave personal possessions at the school. That is the rule. One time someone seriously just left a ball pen at the big table, and that was brought*

up. A whole JC had to be about that. That is just one big joke, right? (laugh) That cannot be taken seriously." (Anna)

It illustrates how some of the personal interpretations are not relevant in the process of judging whether the misbehavior is considered important enough to be brought up. That is an issue for the upbringer. As Bram mentioned in his life story, he would interpret these smaller incidents as a way to learn about himself. Each of Anna's or Bram's personal opinions seem to be okay in the school but are not accepted to influence of the JC. Both ball pen incidents or graver issues are treated the same in the JC process.

Subsequently, these students lack fear for the JC, which seems to encourage honesty as illustrated via Luuk's comment.

"I told them 'you know, I actually proposed to give me a sanction of a one day suspension [a special sanction.] I mean, it was my mistake. I regret it a lot. That is why I proposed it. In this way, I can put it behind me. Then, I can take it up as a learning moment and continue as usual. That was adopted. I was a day home, just thinking about what I had done. Afterwards, we reconciled. And so it was good." (Luuk)

Luuk's frank acknowledgement about his own behavior demonstrates that the JC can encourage self-reflection on student behavior. Feelings, emotions and understandings seem to have been processed by both parties and both appear to have found a mode that allowed them to repair their social relationship.

Nevertheless, Rob would add that the JC system has its challenges, by the fact that it is man-made and run by people.

"It continues to be a challenge to create an awareness that you really run the school together and not by for example, only staff members, older students or chair of the school meeting and JC coordinators or whatever us-them distinction you want to make. There is always a risk and simultaneously a huge challenge to make sure that you run the school together and that you do it together as an equal community." (Rob)

This underscores the subjective aspect of justice. Justice is embodied in the set of rules agreed upon by the community. The challenge is whether the system is capable enough to rejuvenate itself in order to minimize the gap between the rules and the relevance towards a continuously evolving social reality.

Additionally, in cases the process was perceived as just, students like Rob would accept the outcome of the process even if they were personally unsatisfying.

"It is not always that easy to accept, but it is a necessary life lesson that you cannot always get the outcome they way you want it. And a few times, I and two other staff

members were voting on one side and the rest of the school on the other. Oh well, it is what it is. I do not need to be happy with it. I do not need to like it, but I do have to conform myself to the decisions made by the school meeting. And I have decided to commit myself to the system, so this is the outcome." (Rob)

It seems that Rob has hit the bottom line here. He allows himself to disagree with a decision, even though he understands the outcome to be fair in the context of the general working of the school. In addition, the direct experience students have with the JC seems to function as one of the examples of how impartiality is practiced. Subsequently, they start to apply their sense of impartiality in other situations as well.

"For me personally, it was definitely quite difficult because I attended the same school as my little brother. And brother love is always a little different compared with other people. And that can often class a bit harder. In the beginning it was very difficult to deal with that, because you don't know how things work and you sometimes take things personally indeed. But once I understood the system a little better it was actually automatically like 'Uhm, I start to get personal here, to become partial, I'm not going to do that.' And then I would say 'nah, this time, I notice it becomes personal and I will not take part in this [decision] anymore.'" (Bram)

This reveals another element of students' experiences with an impartial process. All participants show their ability to reflect on what the JC system meant to them. Luuk and Bram's reflections indicate a willingness to be confronted with honesty. Admitting that one is incorrect and accepting the consequence of it, even if it means that the immediate experience is not necessarily fun. Rob and Anna reflect on situations in which they personally do not agree with a decision. Rob sometimes disagreed with the final decision made in the school meeting. Anna's disagreement is related to the way small and big transgressions are processed the same in the JC. Nevertheless, the bottom line for them is that the process of the system is understood to work, to be safe, just and effective.

Besides the context of the Sudbury school, students evaluated some other contexts as impartial as well.

"I think that [the primary school period] already was a fairer period if you compare it with the period in which you are a bit older. So, I noticed that if you have an opinion as a child, is it much easier to push it through. Especially, when you are in a class you can participate more because I think teachers often take it less personal. So, from that perspective, I have never had much problems with it fairness in back then." (Bram)

For Bram, partiality appears to be a heuristic for what he understands to be just. In Bram's experiences, his primary school teachers did not seem to take Bram's behavior as

a personal attack on them, which seems to imply they adjusted their response to Bram accordingly. On the other hand, the ability to change the situation to meet his needs seems to be another aspect of his sense of justice as he talks about *pushing things through.* However, it can be argued that the relationship between the teacher and Bram seems to increase the chances of unjust situations as well, as teachers ultimately decide upon the tasks the students have to do. Nevertheless, compared the situations such as the class on the binary system in which the teacher tried to exercise power over him, he seems to perceive his primary school period as more just.

Further, the importance of impartiality for students can be observed in cases where this principle was violated. In cases where students understood the situation as partial, they seem to associate it with injustice.

> *"At some point, [the history teacher] noticed that [my peer] would do things differently from what she wanted. I remember that one guy in my class really could not handle [her iron regime]. Really, he drew in all his notebooks, for example. And she really hated that. Every time at the beginning of the class, she would be there at his desk and everything he pretty much did was publicly roasted. That was of course completely ridiculous. These were things on which she would split hairs again and again." (Rob)*

Rob interpreted the situation to be partial as the history teacher appears to have decided to apply her strict rules extra consequently on one of Rob's classmates. Although the teacher's practice is supposed to maintain justice in the classroom, her understanding and practice of justice was not shared by Rob. Instead, he understood that his classmate *"was just bullied by her."*

Therefore, these students share an appreciation for a process in which they feel that they have been treated fairly. They observe and appreciate how impartiality is reflected in other aspects of daily school life. Rob and Anna shed light on the idea that it is okay to personally disagree with some collectively made decisions or regulations. Interestingly, they appear to exhibit honesty and compliance to the JC system and themselves. These findings are supported by situations that students perceive to be partial. Rob for example, understood his teacher's strictness towards one of his classmates as unjust.

5.2.5 Justice in Outcome

The outcome of the decisions made in order to bring justice appear to be another feature that students find important. They seem to associate justice of outcome with the fulfilment of needs.

> *"There will not be a friendship broken because you brought each other up or some-*

thing. So, that is why it is not taken personally like if you do something, then for the rest of the school year you will be seen as the one who did that, you know. It always gets treated quickly and forgotten. And in the other [special high] school it could be that if you had some anger - back then I had a lot of anger attacks at my old school; I really have thrown objects to bullies you know - then you were known for it and it will never be forgotten. And then new fights arose. It kept coming back." (Luuk)

Luuk seems to make a clear association between just outcomes and learning from the situation, the ability to move on and reintegration into the community. In his experience, the need to (re)connect with classmates, staff or teachers was met in the Sudbury school. As he recovered at the Sudbury school, such response seemed to help him to dismantle his fears for social rejection. In contrast, his experience at his former high school, past incidents seem to be a source for holding old grudges which appear to foster new conflicts.

The fact that Luuk appears to remember these unjust situations vividly, can be observed in the following situation from Anna as well.

"We didn't have the Cito test but the NIO test.[8] *I actually thought it to be a sort of unfair you know. It was really such a snapshot in which you are tested on a fraction. I am very dyslectic. As a result of this, when it came to topics that I did understand, it took me a long time to read the question and reread the question before I understood it. And then, for me it felt that it was more about how difficult I thought the text would be rather than that I did not understood the topic. I think that is where the feeling of injustice comes from." (Anna)*

In Anna's experience, the outcome of the test did not reflect what she knew about a subject. She thought this to be unfair as the outcome of the test did not do what it was promised to do. Over time, her perception of the situation slightly changed. As she reflected back on this situation, she seemed understand the situation differently. She associated dyslexia with the idea that *"people who have dyslexia are often very creative"*. As a result of this, she seemed to have come to terms with her dyslexia because she liked to identify herself with being creative, as creativity *"has become part of [her] profession"*. This reveals a recurring relationship between the outcome and process involved in the students' evaluation of justice and injustice.

Interestingly, these students appear to be aware of their behavior on which they would agree to be unjust from their part.

[8] In the Netherlands, the CITO and NIO test are developed for the penultimate year in primary school. These intelligence tests are supposed to measure which high school level would most likely suit a student best (de Boer, 2020).

"[I] Started to truant - forging letter statements of being sick and that kind of embarrassing stuff." (Rob)

Rob's understanding that his behavior was embarrassing seems to imply an acknowledgement that his behavior was questionable. It could be said that he seems to commit an injustice from a teacher's perspective. Nevertheless, it can be understood (but not necessarily justified) in the context of his circumstances as explained in his life story. As his strategy to only work during school time was insufficient for dealing with his disinterest for school, he seemed to have given up all together. What should be noted is that Rob's remark involves his current reflection from his past. This implies that the understanding of justice in a situation can evolve and change over time.

On the other hand, students seem to generally experience just outcomes at the Sudbury school. There, they experience the space to explore the activities that meet their needs.

"The only thing you cannot do is to beat each other, which has never been the intention in the first place, so to say. So, you are quite free to make your own choices." (Rob)

As students can pursue their own interest, some situations of conflict seem to have disappeared. Dynamics in which students are organized to do the same thing together even if they do not want to seem to occur less frequently in the Sudbury school.

Thus, students appear to have a keen sense of what is allowed and what is not, whether they would agree with it or not in term of justice, and whether they would do it anyways. In the midst of these understandings, they seem to associate just outcomes with the fulfillment of their basic needs. These include their need to socially (re)connect after an incident, to be safe, and to receive support for learning. On the other hand, in situations where the outcome did not do what it promises to do, students seem to perceive it to be unjust as well. This implies that students evaluate the justice outcomes to the extend it met their needs.

5.2.6 Concluding Remarks

These findings suggest that the students of this study evaluate issues of justice based on five interrelated features of justice. Firstly, their interest and understanding of the world influences the scope of what they are willing and unwilling to do, and how they want to be treated. From their world of experience, they seem to find it important that the activities they engage in make sense. Any situation in which their understanding clashes with that of others is potentially an issue of justice. Secondly, these students associate justice issues with whether or not they accept the authority that makes judgment decisions. They seem to associate people who try to exercise power over them with injustice, while they accept authority from those who make judgments that take their needs into account.

The implication is that a teacher's attempt to manage student behavior by punishment seems to be countered with open or implicit resentment. Thirdly, it appears that the frustrations these students experience could be alleviated if they were allowed to participate in matters important to them. They seem to continue to be frustrated in mainstream school as they appear to have generally two dissatisfying options for response: submission or rebellion. In contrast to the Sudbury school or teachers that allow participation, they would have the options of acceptance or opportunity to change it. The latter two options seem to support the student's need to constructively channel their frustrations about a situation. This implies that different schools shape the situations students encounter, and hence the topics that become an issue of justice. Fourthly, these students find impartiality to be important during the practice or system that is supposed to bring justice. While impartiality is associated with fair treatment, partiality is associated with injustice. In cases where students receive fair treatment, they seem to be more willing to accept outcomes they find less satisfying, and more compliant with the collective rules. Lastly, students seem to evaluate just outcomes according to whether their needs were met or not met. These students seem to find it important that a just outcome aligns with the justification of having the outcome in the first place. In other words, these students want the rules and practices they follow to make sense to them.

This implies that these students appear to be aware of what just and unjust outcomes look like. In cases where they care about an unjust outcome, they experience negative feelings including anger and frustration. The intention of the sanctions appears to play a role in their interpretations of the situation. While situations with teachers in these examples were negative and appear to emphasize retribution, the sanctions from the JC are interpreted to be contributing for their learning, safety, and positive social relationships. Alternatively, they seem to respond less fiercely to situations of injustice if they were aware that they were committing it and the outcome met their underlying need or interest. For that reason, these students developed a sophisticated sense of what they find just, and how they position themselves towards that in terms of understandings and actions.

6 | Discussion: Feelings, Needs and Justice

"People heal from their pain when they have an authentic connection with another human being."
- Marshall B. Rosenberg

This research found that students' conception of justice involves five features. These aspects include (1) student's interest, (2) their ability to participate in situations involving justice, (3) their acceptance of authority, (4) their perception of procedural justice and (5) their perception of just outcomes. In any situation, whether just or unjust, the students of this research make a choice on how to respond. They experienced having a different set of options in their mainstream and Sudbury schools. Their life stories clarify how these responses seem to have worked out for them. In this chapter, I will discuss these findings in relation to my theoretical framework, which includes Rosenberg's framework of nonviolent communication, and the concepts of retributive justice aims and restorative justice practices.

The findings underscore the significance of Rosenberg's framework of nonviolent communication. It confirms Rosenberg's argument that the desire to fulfill needs motivate people to act (Rosenberg, 2015a). The difference between the satisfaction of needs and the nonviolent process towards the fulfillment of needs becomes clearer in the following two situations. Firstly, Bram's story about the escalation of an argument with one of his teachers illustrates how violent strategies such as punishment and forceful language such as commands are failed attempts to meet unmet needs (Chapter 5.2, p. 66). In this game of blame and punishment, the teacher 'wins' at the expense of Bram, which is illustrated in the teacher's command to let the rest of the class go except for Bram. In this way, he was punishing Bram, which did not withhold Bram from refraining from his behavior. The process in which both the teacher and Bram tried to get their needs met was perceived to be unfair, while the outcome was dissatisfying. In fact, several researchers pointed out that such punishments or retributions encourage students to behave the way they do and could harm students (Fronius et al., 2016; Kohn, 1999; Rosenberg, 2005a). However, theoretical insights need to be refined in order to understand students when referring to situations where a student seems to know that something was unjust in the context of his other stories but seems less affected by that injustice because a need of him/her was fulfilled as well, which is illustrated in the second situation. This involved Bram testing the boundaries of the teacher's patience (Chapter 5, p. 40). It illustrates cases in which

students focus on the fulfillment of his or her needs rather than questioning the justice process involved to get there. In this situation, Bram's need to have fun is at the expense of the teacher's emotional well-being. Thus, it seems that the human drive to fulfill their needs seems to have priority over the process involved to fulfill it. This can be understood nonjudgmentally, which does not necessarily mean that the process towards the fulfilment of needs is automatically nonviolent or just.

Additionally, the findings suggest that Rosenberg's understanding of needs could be refined by adding the dimension of time frame. The following two situations indicate a tension between needs in the immediate moment and those for the long-term. In the first situation, which took place at the Sudbury school, Luuk acknowledged his mistakes during a conflict with other students, proposed to suspend himself for a day and reconciled with the other students afterwards (chapter 5.2, p. 72). Even though the immediate situation does not seem fun to him, he had a long-term need to continue with his plans and goals. The way the situation resolved itself met the communal need for justice, safety and social connection. This confirms Daly's finding (2016) that restorative justice practices could function as truth seeking mechanisms. In the second situation, Rob's story about how he accepted dissatisfying outcomes in the school meeting illustrates that students do not only care about whether the concrete outcome of a decision meets their immediate needs. He recognizes that he agreed and committed to the decision-making process in the school meeting, which fulfills his need for safety and being heard over the long-term. Thus, paying attention to the relation between immediate and long-term fulfillment of needs could provide a better understanding of why these students accept dissatisfying outcomes in certain situations.

The relationship between justice, feelings and needs from the perspective of the students of this research may be summarized in the following table.

Table 6.1: Student's Experience of Justice

	Satisfying outcome	Dissatisfying outcome
Fair procedure	A. Participants feel happy, satisfied, at peace.	B. Participants feel frustrated, but accepting the outcome.
Unfair procedure	C. Participants did not care too much about the procedure, because they got what they were interested in / needed.	D. Participants feel angry, deeply unhappy, drained.

The two rows refer to whether the students in this study perceived the procedure to be fair. The two columns refer to whether these students were satisfied or dissatisfied

with the final outcome of the justice procedure. Four categories emerge from this, which emphasize that students have different responses to similar situations. Because of their specific situation in terms of personal history and situation, they may experience different feelings and needs to similar situations. If students perceived to have been treated fairly, and the outcome would meet the need they had in that situation, they expressed their happiness with the situation, like in Category A. In category-B-situations, students expressed some frustration with the outcome but accepted it. A deeper understanding of their experience of dissatisfaction may be gained by distinguishing immediate needs from long-term ones and needs from wants. Thirdly, participants perceiving the situation to be a category-C-type often noticed the injustice in procedure but appeared to feel more indifferent towards the issue of justice, as their needs were met. Lastly, Category-D-situations include those in which students perceived both to be unfairly treated and felt unhappy with the outcome. Noticeably, the events that led up to dropping out of their mainstream high schools involved Category-D-type-events. Interestingly, their evaluation of the same situation could change over time, for example, Anna's story about how she thought testing was unfair as she had dyslexia (chapter 5.2, p. 75). When she was younger, she thought the procedure to be unfair, as the testing is supposed to test understanding, not reading. Thinking that she could not express her full understanding on the test, it seems she perceived the situation as described in Category D. Reflecting back on the same incident but now from her current age, she is more satisfied with the outcome as she associates dyslexia with creative people, and likes to understand herself to be a creative person. She effectively moved between categories: from D to C. This demonstrates Rosenberg's notion (Rosenberg that people have the power to change the way they perceive the same situation. He argued that we are responsible for our own feelings and needs. Thus, the table proposes how just and unjust situations these students experienced can be understood in a nonviolent, life-giving manner, while it acknowledges the subjective nature of experience.

In addition, the findings confirm that NVC encompasses an understanding of NVC, which involves the way how we relate with one another. Interestingly, the language these students used to describe their experiences were not clearly NVC vocabulary. Although explicit death threats and scolding at one another break school rules, other instances of violent vocabulary include the use of judgments and moralizing language. Nevertheless, these expressions were contextualized by their understanding of the Sudbury school system. For example, while sanctions could be perceived to be arbitrary, socially made-up punishments, these students interpreted the sanctions as a part of their learning curve and the school's need to maintain collective safety. In other words, these students understood what was said in their school context from a nonviolent understanding, while

their actual words they used could have been labeled as violent vocabulary. This confirms Rosenberg's theory that violent messages or jackal messages can be translated into nonviolent messages (Baran). It implies that sanctions enforced by a teacher or JC are not automatically interpreted as a means for learning or punishment. Rather, this depends on the student's perspective. The way these students understand sanctions depends on the way they interpret their context. Hence, it seems that these students sometimes talk in jack language and listening with giraffe or jackal ears, which depends on the context. Hence, NVC language may be distinguished from NVC understanding. As NVC seems to provide a flexible framework to understand students more nonjudgmentally, it could provide a valuable tool for teachers to consider.

Further, the table underscores the observation that these participants had their authentic understandings, insights and opinions about justice issues. As mentioned by researchers who studied classroom injustice, the student's perception on justice and injustices in the classroom affect their behavior. For example, Luuk explains how he was angry with situations in which his classmate cheated. Indeed, according to Chory-Assad and Tata (1999) students who perceived grading procedures to be unfair, evaluated their teacher negatively. Interestingly, the findings of the research demonstrate that situations of unfair grading procedures are socially constructed, as these procedures, and thus such situations, have been absent in the Sudbury School. This seems to imply that the likelihood of certain types of situations of justice involves a close relationship to the procedures and agreements made and enforced in a group of people. Additionally, in order for the situation to resonate with a sense of justice, it seems to require that the members of a community agree with and/or accept the rules and procedures in place. Thus, this narrative research contributes to the understanding of justice issues at school by providing an opportunity for students to define and explain their understanding of justice by themselves.

Moreover, Feldman's conclusion (2001) that students "own and shape" the justice processes at the Sudbury Valley School is confirmed by the students of this study (p. 25). The students of this study experienced that the JC is an integral part of their daily life at school. As Bram mentioned, it is possible to change the school rules if the majority of the school meeting members agree with the change. Rob explains how he enjoyed his responsibilities as JC coordinator, while Anna was involved in it as JC member. As it is typical to be involved in the JC in various ways, it helped students to develop a better sense of what it means to act responsibly and justly. Rob and Luuk acknowledged that they started to take more responsibility for their own behavior. For example, Luuk explicitly attributed his interactions with the JC to have helped him with processing his anger attacks. In doing so, he started to become more social and decided to study pro-

gramming. Such findings affirm the positive outcomes researchers have found in relation with restorative practices, including the reduction of violence in school (Lewis et al., 2013; McMorris et al., 2013), increased motivation to study McMorris et al., 2013), and contribution to a better atmosphere (McMorris et al., 2013). In this process of daily JC encounters, the American students in Feldman's study and the Dutch students of this research seem to agree that justice involves safety, while injustice involves a form of violence. Thus, this research contributes to the research on understanding the experience of students with the Sudbury model in different cultural contexts.

Lastly, this research contributes to the body of knowledge that could be valuable for the attainment of the SDG goals 4.A, 16.2 and 16.6 (United Nations, 2020b; United Nations, 2020a).[1] SDG goal 4.A aims to improve inclusion of marginalized students in education. Although the indicator seems to address the material aspect of education, such as electricity, and "adapted infrastructure for students with disabilities," the aim could arguably be extended to their mental well-being as well (United Nations, 2020b). This research demonstrates that the students of this study appeared to have more positive experiences with school if they thought they are treated justly, including those who are considered to be a vulnerable group. Hence, addressing the issue of justice in schools could contribute to increasing the satisfaction and quality of education. Perhaps more importantly, this research contributes to the understanding of the processes and insights that support peace, justice, and strong institutions. As these students experienced what it meant to be treated justly, act responsibly, and behave nonviolently, their habits probably influence the way they will enter society. These insights could be an inspiration for reducing student's experiences with "physical punishments and psychological aggression from caregivers" (SDG target 16.2.1) and increase satisfaction with public services such as public education as described in SDG target 16.2.2 (United Nations, 2020a). Thus, this research could contribute to the positive effects of reduced violence and improved positive experiences at school, which could increase the quality of education and the collective support for strong, just, and peaceful institutions.

In conclusion, in this research students' perceptions of justice shed some light on the nuances in Rosenberg's framework of nonviolent communication, which developed a concrete vocabulary for communicating nonviolently. From the analysis of students' experi-

[1]The UN defined the SDG Goals 4.A, 16.2 and 16.6 in the following way. SDG goal 4.A aims to "build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all" (United Nations, 2020b).
SDG target 16.2.1 measures "the proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month" (United Nations, 2020a).
SDG target 16.6.2 measures "the proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services" (United Nations, 2020a).

ences with justice and injustice, I have highlighted four nuances that could offer a richer understanding of the nonviolent communication framework. These include (1) paying attention between the difference of a nonviolent process producing outcomes, and the understanding outcomes in a nonviolent way. Secondly, distinguishing needs from wants, and (3) immediate needs from long-term needs is helpful to understand someone's responses indicating about their feelings. Lastly, there seems to be a difference between nonviolent language and nonviolent understanding. In addition to these nuances, the student's conception of justice, perceived options for response and motivations driving their life stories. This illustrates that the perceptions of their own social reality studied is multi-faceted and ever evolving. Thus, a better understanding of justice from a student perspective could contribute to insights that could improve the quality education and the building of just institutions, which are part of the SDG goals.

7 | Trustworthiness of the Study

It is only when you meet someone of a different culture from yourself that you begin to realize what your own beliefs really are.
- George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p.149.

The evaluation of the quality of qualitative research emphasizes the relational understanding of the findings rather than direct truth-value (Clandinin, 2006; Lieblich et al., 1998; Tracy, 2010). Lieblich explains that Mishler (199) argues for consensual validation which means that the views shared throughout the research make sense to the research community and informed individuals (Lieblich et al., 1998). This appears to capture a narrow focus of the multifaceted nature that qualitative research is. Tracy (2010) agrees with Ellingson that "good qualitative research is like a crystal with various facets representing the aims, needs, and desires of various stakeholders including participants, the academy, society, lay public, policy makers, and last, but certainly not least, the researcher" (p. 849). Navigating the complexities involved in such understanding, practical decisions need to be made within the means, skills and time the researcher has. To evaluate the final outcome of the research which is the research report, Tracy (2010) proposes a parsimonious framework entailing eight aspects to evaluate qualitative research, including 1) a worthy topic, 2) significant contribution, 3) resonance, 4) credibility, 5) meaningful coherence, 6) sincerity, 7) ethics, and 8) rich rigor (p.837). She argues that the benefits of using this framework can function as a pedagogical tool, encourage dialogue across different qualitative disciplines, and thus helps to 'communicate the value for our work to a variety of audiences.'

Firstly, the criteria of a worthy topic refer to the question 'was it interesting reading about the topic of research?' What captures the readers interest can vary from research interest to the theoretical or conceptual understanding (Bryman, 2016; Tracy, 2010), to one's personal interest to gain insights about their own lives (Bold, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998), and/or one's interest to connect it with the significance in public debates on societal issues (Tracy, 2010). As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I have been grappling with issues of justice in school. School, at least in western countries, has been a significant experience for students, parents and the public sector. The contrasts between the students' experiences in the mainstream school and Sudbury school, their experiences with retributive justice aims and restorative justice practices ask questions about and challenge the everyday life experiences in school. In doings so, my aim throughout this

research was to encourage dialogue and understanding.

This closely relates to the criteria of significant contribution. Tracy (2010) explains that it involves asking questions about how does this study "extend knowledge, improve practice, generate ongoing research, or liberate / empower (p. 846)?" Although some of these connections should be made explicit in this research, I think this question is mainly for the reader to answer. Nevertheless, I will offer my aim with this research. I wanted to contribute to the clarification of how students' sense of justice relates to the complexities involved in their situations. An important finding of this research is that the students' conception of themselves could clash with adults' conception of the student, especially in cases where adults believe that students are less capable of making sound judgment. Even if adults base their response to students on this deficient conception, students continue to make judgments and act upon them. As this research demonstrates, their judgments can be understood in a way that makes sense. Ignoring or misjudging the students' take on the world, whether intentional or not, could harm students. If one seriously accepts that it is worthwhile to listen to students' ideas on just treatment, then it is necessary to rethink the way teachers are authorized to make ethical judgments in school. To explore the ramifications of altering such assumption in practice, could be further investigated in action research. Perhaps, such research could contribute to updating the relevance of school in the experience of students. Further, my main focus for the discussion chapter was to connect theory to a helpful understanding of students' conceptualizations of justice. I want to underscore that these were not meant to build theory in the scope of this research, although it could be interesting for further research.

Thirdly, the principle of resonance deals with the research ability to elicit evocativeness. According to Tracy (2010) a good qualitative report is not boring but "surprises, delights and tickles something within us" (p. 845). During the writing of this report, I noticed that the research data touches upon other relevant educational topics outside the scope of my research focus as well. Perhaps this research encourages us to explore our thinking about healing/recovery, the quality of learning in school, and good citizenship.

Fourthly, the principle of credibility refers to whether the reader considers the research to be 'trustworthy enough to act on and make decisions in line with" (Tracy, 2010, p. 543). This research acknowledges that the methodology and findings are context and researcher dependent. For this reason, it is understandable that verification in terms of duplicating research findings is ill-fitting. Accordingly, I used a different strategy to help the reader and myself to verify this research. Firstly, I used the strategy of thick description. During the report writing, I would think about how the words describing the concepts discussed would reflect in the mind of the reader. In doing so, I paid more attention to detailed aspects of the data that would show rather than tell my understanding of

the concepts and scenes described. As I have no intention to defend my findings against evidence that proves otherwise, I should mention some limitation on a think-description strategy. It could be that some of my tacit knowledge relevant to this research exists outside my awareness. For example, it could be that some idiomatic nuances are lost in the translation from Dutch to English.

In writing the report, it is necessary to pay attention to the principle of coherence. According to Tracy (2010) this means that the overall impression of the study achieved to "interconnect the research design, data collection, and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals" (p. 848). For example, I had difficulty to explain the connection between terms, concepts, and different chapters in such a way that it is easily accessible to the reader. My strategy to pay more attention to coherence was to talk about my master thesis with different people, including the research participants, my supervisor, and other students. By understanding my research through the eyes of someone else, I could better spot the missing links.

Sixth, being sincere and honest about the research results and process is considered of importance (Clandinin et al., 2018; Tracy, 2010). Being frank about the strengths and shortcomings of this research process requires self-reflexivity. A strength of self-reflexivity in narrative research is that I could pay extra attention to the difference between what people say rather than what we assume what people say. In this case, it provided an opportunity to reflect on how students explained their own rule-breaking behavior alongside how adults explain such student behavior. Nevertheless, our short-coming in recalling events, particularly past events accurately places a restriction on self-reflexivity as research tool (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011). For example, my reflection on my position as researcher is probably incomplete in terms of the factors that could have played a role in making research decisions. From hindsight, I can better understand how my positivist notions on certainty and clarity could have influenced research decisions. I thought that this meant in practice that I should work through the thesis in the order of the chapter outline. To my frustration, I could not stick to that strategy, since it was hindered by things that were missing or popping up. Only later in the process and with the help of my supervisor, I was able to let go of this tendency and work more heuristically in the way qualitative research is intended. With the best of the knowledge back then, this was the best I could make my decisions. Hence, the implication is that self-reflexivity brought me farther than without it but is not a watertight tool for untangling and identifying all factors that have influenced my research decisions.

Seventh, ethics principles should guide the entire process of the research (Clandinin et al., 2018). During the research process I started to realize how ethical research goes beyond the concrete encounters between the researcher and participants. The first issue is

informed consent in the form of a participant agreement. Although it may not be appropriate for any context (Bold, 2011; Clandinin, 2006), in my research it was appropriate to do given the participants school culture in which explicit agreements on important matters are highly appreciated. I followed a standard consent form for social research as suggested by the University of Oulu (see appendix C). As the Sudbury school was relatively small in size, I requested an extra conversation about anonymity of the school with my contact person there. We agreed that the use of pseudonyms was sufficient. Secondly, as explained in chapter 4, doing no harm encouraging a reciprocal relationship guided my attitude towards the participants during the interview. How I understand my role as interviewer is to ask questions, show understanding and ask for clarifications. The participants were positive about the way I conducted the interviews and research with them. As open as the participants appeared to be already, they reminded me from time to time that I could ask anything I wanted as well. For example, Luuk would emphasize that he wanted to talk about his experiences, including the negative ones. I think such dynamics is a good indication for the level of trust and openness we built throughout the interviews. Further, one of the issues I struggled with during the interviews was about how much I could disclose about my own position towards the research. For example, one of the research participants asked me in a direct manner why I was interested in this topic of justice. I was wondering how my answer may affect the research data. As the relationship should be reciprocal, at the end of the last interview with him I decided to answer his question. Thirdly, In the last stage of my research, I contacted all participants and contact persons at the Sudbury schools again to evaluate our collaboration. Anna said that I conducted the research with respect and care towards the participants. Generally, they were pleased with their involvement in the research process. The comments and feedback they gave on my thesis report were valuable. I decided to adopt their comments that helped to clarify my interpretations and protect their anonymity better. This implies that I would not adopt ungrounded suggestions that would alter my interpretation of the data. The final conversations are in line with Clandinin. If the researcher decides to break the ties it should be done in such a way it leaves the participant feeling 'honored and not exploited' (Clandinin, 2006, p. 545). Lastly, I thought about how the participants' stories will become part of my memory, even long after I finalized this research project. Clandinin's (2018) understanding of relational ethics was a helpful guide in this process. Essentially, ethical narrative research acknowledges that "we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 2). Subsequently, it alerted me that I want to treat these stories with care in the way I talk about, learn from, and listen to them, even after this research project is finished.

Eighth, the research should demonstrate rich rigor in terms of sufficient detail and thor-

oughness. According to Tracy (2010) rigor in research can provide "face validity," which means whether the research sound reasonable from first impression (p. 841). Alternatively, Morse (2002) observes that rigor itself does not validate the process. Being able to document the process of research in a precise manner is useless if the strategy chosen does not fit the research. In other words, I would agree with Morse et al. (2002) that rigor in relation to validity benefits from a reflection on the "quality of decisions, the rationale behind those decisions, and the responsiveness and sensitivity of the investigator to data" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 16). My rationale behind my interpretation of the research data comes from my understanding of NVC, which emphasizes compassionate and non-judgmental interpretations of social situations. In doing so, the set of information that highlights the humanness in us increase the chances of a compassionate response and still reflects something about social reality.

Therefore, I hope the discussion on the eight parsimonious criteria for evaluating my narrative research sheds light on my attitude and awareness of the research process. One of the many takeaways is that perceptiveness on the multidimensional aspects of the research process and outcomes can have a place as long as it connected coherently to the focus of my research.

8 | Conclusion

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."
- Nelson Mandela

The findings of my research reveal how the research participants in this study experienced situations involving justice issues. The stories of these four participants reveal a dramatic critical incident in which they felt completely blocked in their respective mainstream high schools and dropped out. The situations they described as events leading up to this major critical incident in their life involved issues of justice. Their experiences of unjust and just events are created rather than solely noticed as they are based on their conception of justice, they would understand the situation as just or unjust. Although each participant had their own notion of justice which differed from one another in some aspects, from their stories emerged five features that characterized these students' notions of justice and injustice. These interrelated features include (1) students' interest, (2) their ability to participate in situations involving justice, (3) their acceptance of authority, (4) their perception of procedural justice and (5) their perception of just outcomes. Rosenberg's framework on nonviolent communication suggests that the study of needs and feelings communicated in the students' stories allows us as reader to develop a more compassionate understanding that still correspond to their social reality. Indeed, the underlying needs and feelings emerging from situations involving issues of justice led to a response or action from the student's side. In mainstream high school the stories of these students indicate that it depends on the teacher whether they were allowed to participate in the process to come to a verdict. In some respect, justice is decided on by the teacher for them. Subsequently, these students either felt so negatively about school they dropped out like Luuk, Bram and Rob, or experienced limited freedom to do the actions that were best for one's physical health as this was the case in Anna's life story. To find solutions for their challenging and varying life circumstances, they found what they needed at the Sudbury school. The participants explain how they experienced empowering options to deal with disagreement, conflict and diversity by participating in the school meeting and judicial committee. In those rule-and-policy making system and justice system they perceived to be treated justly.

This implies that students in this research were aware of issues of justice in situations directly affecting them. In other words, it evinces that their social reality included a self-

conception in which they did think about, judged and acted upon their notions of justice and injustice. This contrasts with policies they mention in the mainstream school system in which teachers appear to formally hold the authority to make judicial judgments in class. It seems to be based on the incomplete adult assumption in which students are perceived to be insufficiently able to make sound judgments on issues of justice in situations. Although an individual teacher may agree that this assumption is incomplete and hence allow more student participation, it is an individual's choice. The issue with such construction could be that it allows for situations in which the teacher's judgment triumphs student's judgments at the expense of the student. Whether these painful situations causing potential suffering are necessary is an issue to further reflect on.

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A | Dutch Education System

The following image illustrates the Dutch education system. When students enter high school, they receive advise from the school at which level(s) they are allowed to enter: VMBO, HAVO or VWO. Then, students make a choice at which level they want to start. In the first few years in high school, it is often possible to switch from level if necessary. Each of these levels prepare students for different studies in vocational or higher education, based on their academic potential (Nuffic, 2020). VMBO prepares students for a vocational study, while HAVO prepares them for applied university. VWO prepares students for University.

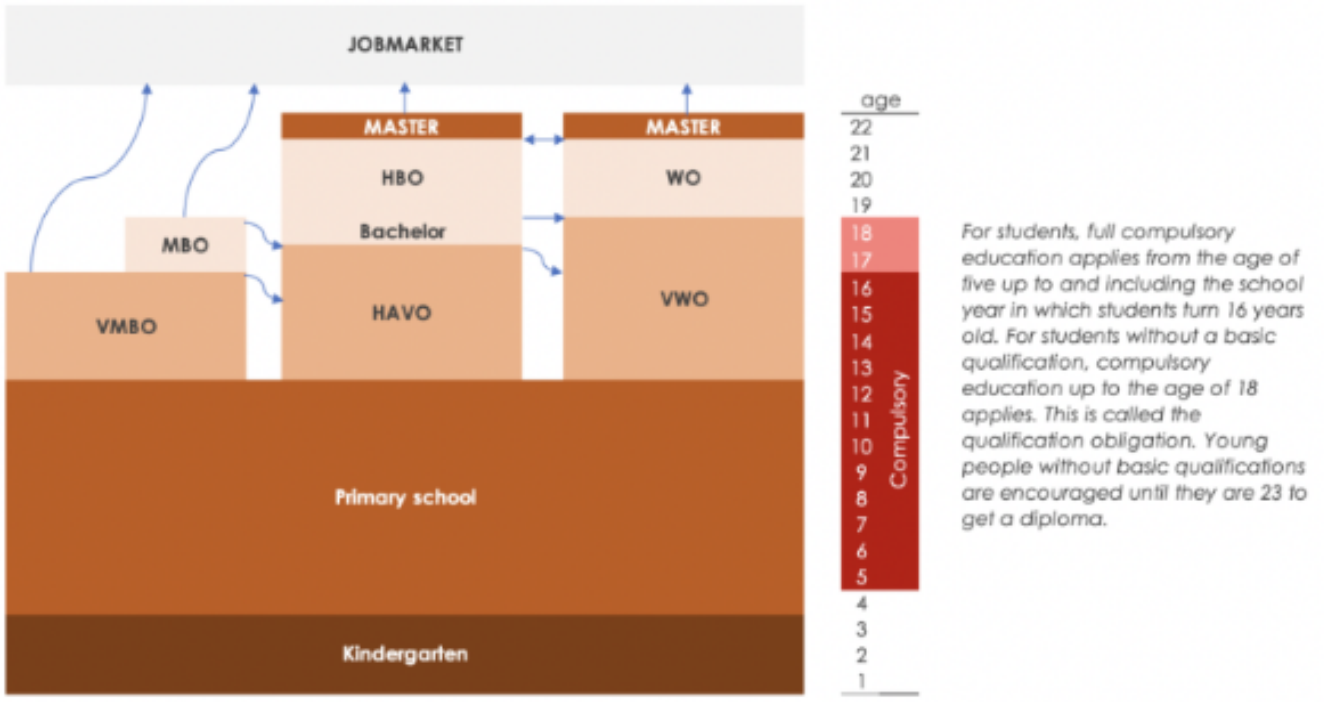

Figure A.1: Overview of the Dutch Education System (All About Expats, 2020).

B | Basic Needs and Feelings

The following figure provides a comprehensive overview of some basic needs and feelings we all have according to Rosenberg's framework of nonviolent communication.

Some Basic Feelings We All Have

Feelings when needs are fulfilled

- Amazed
- Comfortable
- Confident
- Eager
- Energetic
- Fulfilled
- Glad
- Hopeful
- Inspired
- Intrigued
- Joyous
- Moved
- Optimistic
- Proud
- Relieved
- Stimulated
- Surprised
- Thankful
- Touched
- Trustful

Feelings when needs are not fulfilled

- Angry
- Annoyed
- Concerned
- Confused
- Disappointed
- Discouraged
- Distressed
- Embarrassed
- Frustrated
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Impatient
- Irritated
- Lonely
- Nervous
- Overwhelmed
- Puzzled
- Reluctant
- Sad
- Uncomfortable

Some Basic Needs We All Have

Autonomy

- Choosing dreams/goals/values
- Choosing plans for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

Celebration

- Celebrating the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
- Celebrating losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)

Integrity

- Authenticity • Creativity
- Meaning • Self-worth

Interdependence

- Acceptance • Appreciation
- Closeness • Community
- Consideration
- Contribution to the enrichment of life
- Emotional Safety • Empathy
- Honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations)
- Love • Reassurance
- Respect • Support
- Trust • Understanding

Physical Nurturance

- Air • Food
- Movement, exercise
- Protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
- Rest • Sexual expression
- Shelter • Touch • Water

Play

- Fun • Laughter

Spiritual Communion

- Beauty • Harmony
- Inspiration • Order • Peace

Figure B.1: Feelings and Needs (Rosenberg, 2015a).

C | Participant Consent Form

Toestemmingsverklaring interview
Masters Research project: De perceptie van studenten over hun ervaring met (on)rechtvaardigheid op de middelbare school
Jiao Harmsen

Bedankt voor uw toestemming om mee te doen met het bovenaan staand genoemde onderzoeksproject. U begrijpt dat dit interview is samengesteld om informatie te verzamelen over de ervaring van (on)rechtvaardigheid op de middelbare school en de mogelijke uitdagingen die daaraan verbonden zijn. De universiteit van Oulu, waaraan dit Masters project is verbonden, eist dat de geïnterviewde expliciet toestemming geeft voor het participeren in het interview en hoe de gegevens verzamelt van het interview worden gebruikt. Voor mij is deze toestemmingsverklaring nodig om er zeker van te zijn dat u het doel van uw participatie en het doel van die condities die eraan verbonden zijn begrijpt. Na het lezen van dit formulier en het ondertekenen daarvan geeft u toestemming aan het interview en de bijbehorende condities:

1. Het interview zal worden opgenomen en worden getranscribeerd.
2. Het transcript zal naar u worden opgestuurd zodat u de mogelijkheid heeft om mogelijke feitelijke fouten te verbeteren.
3. Het transcript zal worden geanalyseerd door Jiao Harmsen, in samenwerking met haar super visor Katri jokikokko.
4. Alle de inhoud van het interview dat wordt gebruikt in de finale versie van de Masters thesis zal worden geanonimiseerd zodat uw identiteit en dat van de school niet bekend wordt gemaakt.
5. De records in kwestie zullen worden bewaard.
6. De condities van hierboven uitgeschreven kan alleen worden aangepast door het geven van uw explicatie goedkeuring.

Bij het tekenen van dit formulier ben ik het er mee-eens dat

1. Mijn deelname aan dit project is vrijwillig. Ik begrijp dat, mocht ik het nodig vinden, ik het recht heb om tijdens de sessie geen antwoord op de vraag te geven, vragen mag stellen of om mij terug te trekken uit het interview.

2. Het interview transcript of delen daarvan mogelijk worden gebruikt zoals hierboven aangegeven.
3. Ik het formulier heb doorgelezen
4. Ik de mogelijkheid heb gehad om alle vragen de stellen ik misschien heb en dat ik begrijp dat ik vrij ben om contact op te nemen met te onderzoeker voor de vragen die ik misschien in de toekomst heb.

Naam Participant:

Signatuur Participant:

Datum:

Signatuur researcher:

Datum:

Contact informatie

Als u verdere vragen hebt over dit project kunt u natuurlijk contact opnemen met:
Jiao Harmsen
Majoor Jacomettiweg 11
3911 BP Rhenen
Mobiel: 0654354305
E-mail: y.j.harmsen@outlook.com

U kunt ook contact opnemen met mijn supervisor:
Dr. Katri Jokikokko
Tel:
e-mail: katri.jokikokko@oulu.fi

D | Interview Questions - Translated Version

During the interview I used the following categories of questions as guide. I would make sure I would touch upon all categories during the two interviews I had with each participant. However, I did not use all of the interview questions. Rather, I would select the ones that were most appropriate in the context of the conversation.

General

- Can you tell me something about yourself?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- Are you still living at home or on your own?
- How would you describe yourself at the moment?

Family

- Tell me about your family.
- Can you tell me what your parents think is important at school?
- What did you remember most about growing up with your brothers and sisters?

School

- Tell me about your school experiences
- What is your first memory about school?
- Which clubs, groups or organizations are you a member of?
- What did you have a hard time as a child with?
- Which event (s) have had a major impact on you?
- Did you find it easy to make friends?
- Which friendships have been very important to you?
- What pressure did you feel as a teenager, and where did they come from?
- What were the most serious problems you had encountered?

- who were important people for you to get through this?
- Who has had a big impact on you?
- Did you like / go to school?
- What do you like about school?
- What do you dislike about school?
- Who was your favorite teacher at the school? Why?
- Who was your least favorite teacher at school? Why?
- Which subjects were most important to you?
- What is important for you at school?
- What do you find easiest about going to school?
- What do you find most difficult at school ?
- Why do you go to this school?
- What were important decisions you made during your time at school?

Questions about honesty / unfairness during school.

- Can you tell me what your best experience / memory of your school time is?
- Can you tell me what your worst experience / memory of your school time is?
- Can you tell me something about what you find important at school?
- What situations did you think went fair at school?
- Which situations did you find unfair at school?

Different context: former schools, and Sudbury Valley School.
About themselves

- What did you learn about yourself during these years?
- What is the most important life lesson that you have learned from this?
- What do you think the role of school should be related to unfairness?
- What do you find most important at the moment related to school ?
- What is the most important thing you have learned yourself?

Follow-up questions:

- How did you feel about it?
- What does such a situation do to you?
- How did you deal with that?
- How was that for you?
- What did you do in that situation?
- You told x, y, z. Can you tell me more about that?
- What needs were met?
- How was this experience for you?
- What needs were not met?
- How did your friends react?
- What did your parents think of this?
- Is there something you would like to change?

Closing

- What advice would you like to give to students who struggle with similar things?
- Do you feel that we have outlined a good picture of your experience with school?
- How do you feel after we have discussed this during the interview?
- Are there any important things that you want to tell but that we have not come to?
- Do you have any questions for me?